

SPRINGFOX – WHITE PAPER BUILDING RESILIENCE

By Stuart Taylor

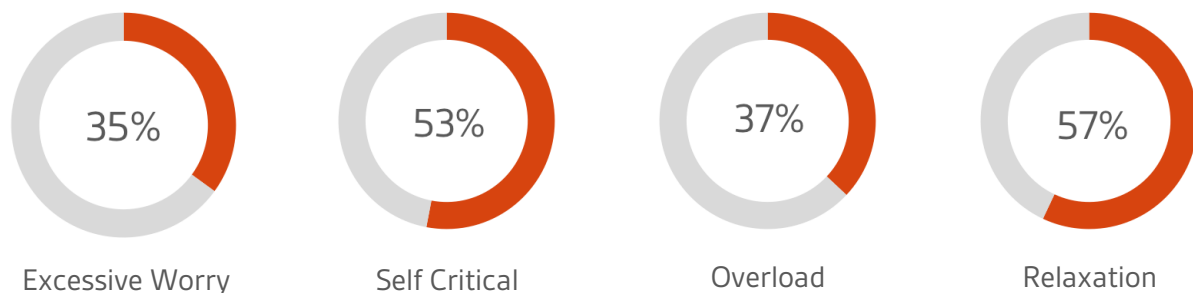
The links between chronic stress and the six leading causes of death (heart disease, cancer, lung disease, liver disease, accidents and suicide) have been established by many studies (American Psychological Association, 2017). Equally, when you survey the modern western lifestyle of a corporate employee it is one of imbalance, overload, a tsunami of emails and back-to-back meetings, long hours, family neglect and self-neglect.

Our recent Global Report (Springfox/The ResilienceInstitute, 2018) details the results of over 21,239 and demonstrates the critical themes in resilience and how they relate to safety, resilience and productivity. Most importantly, we show how resilience improves with your investment.

The data showed that many staff are challenged by an intense work environment with very concerning levels of hypervigilance, chronic stress symptoms, distress and disengagement. Below shows percentage of people experiencing challenge in key resilience areas:

Research Results: 21, 239 people from 2011 – 2018

Percentage of people experiencing challenge with



Often the cultural undertone in organisations is that employees must sprint a marathon and never fail in the pursuit of innovation, competitiveness and bottom-line performance. In part, this level of intensity or pressure is driven long before a staff member's day starts. At the economic, market, shareholder and board level, there is an imperative for growth, competitiveness, customer satisfaction and return on investment that ultimately creates the track for the ensuing race. In a financially driven environment, this manifests internally as rolling transformational change programs, structural re-design and cost-cutting; all happening while the core business of meeting customer requirements needs to be exceeded.

So what impact do these organisational practices have on staff?

As the research results above show, the result is a workforce overloaded and anxious – a fear based culture. There is a point at which pressure to perform becomes counterproductive. Individual and organisational performance declines. For an organisation seeking to be adaptive, innovative and successful, the costs can be staggering: absenteeism, presenteeism, conflict, attention failure and error.

Equally problematic is the assumption that staff are powerless victims unable to make choices.

Resilient people know there is always choice. "Choice behavior is considered the fundamental means by which individuals exert control over their environments." (Sheppes, et al., 2014)

The ultimate choice is to leave an organisation should the leadership and culture not be conducive to a happy and healthy life. The less dramatic choices are influencing or making peace with the current environment.

Let's take another look at our "marathon" analogy. The organisation (and its stakeholders) define the length of the track and what is an acceptable track record. This is "pressure". This is not "stress". Stress is how an individual relates to pressure. It is critical to differentiate between the two words. If my strength is playing chess and running is not, then being asked to run will clearly drive a level of stress. Why? The challenge presented exceeds my skills. If consistently faced with challenges which I believe don't meet my skills, I will likely underperform, become disengaged and, over-time, unhealthy. Conversely, the act of playing chess leads me to high performance, engagement, joy and full health.

To take that definition of stress a little further, it is not just the level of actual pressure vs skills that is important, but also the perceived level of pressure. This is where individual accountability kicks in. A resilient person recognises that pressure is either an external demand or their internal standard. More so, they recognise that the stress experienced now is how I choose to forecast my ability to succeed or fail in the future. A resilient person is far better at gathering resources to improve the forecast and keeping their brain in the present, and not forecasting a catastrophe (worry). The consequences of catastrophising? Stress hormones (especially cortisol) build up, leading ultimately to chronic stress and associated illnesses and life impact. This link is supported by The Resilience Institute data that shows a very high positive correlation between worry (prevalence of 35% of sample) and distress, ill health, depression, not to mention a negative correlation with resilience and engagement.

In this White Paper, we present our Resilience philosophy and integral model as well as explore how to assess and build resilience. An integral approach creates a powerful web of competencies that protect us from distress and lift productivity. Our Resilience Diagnostic development model addresses needs and combines initiatives into an integrated solution.

Defining Resilience

Ask 100 people to define resilience and the common answer is stoicism or "bounce back". This is only part of the story. In America 1 in 4 people are likely to experience depression (Kessler, et al., 2005) and according to an Australian survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008), greater than 1 in 3 people (aged 16-85 years) will suffer a mental disorder in their lifetime with 1 in 5 experiencing this in the last 12 months. Providing support for mental ill-health must be a priority. However, my experience is that life is more than survival – and so is resilience. Beyond "bounce back", resilience is about bouncing forward with courage, turning adversity into opportunity, using our talents creatively and (most importantly) strong connection with others. When these dimensions are mastered, individuals can thrive and be fully engaged in life and their "spirit in action".

So, we define Resilience as a learned ability to have:

- **Courage**
Be enthused by challenge and change
- **Creativity**
Develop talents and opportunity
- **Connection**
Respect and care for others and nature
- **Bounce**
Toughness and recovery skills in adversity

Living a Resilient Life

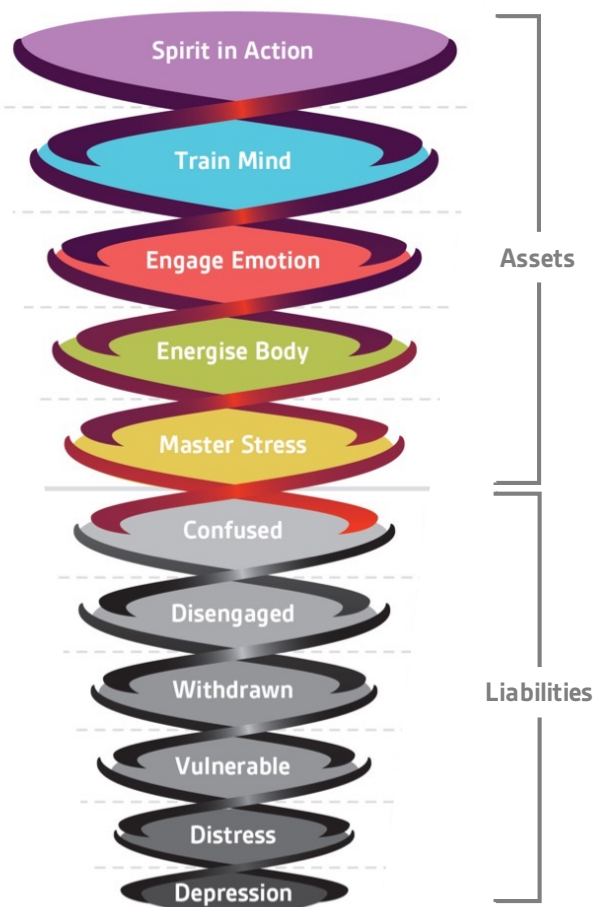
When resilience is cultivated we (and others around us!) enjoy increasing periods of FLOW, a term coined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). In FLOW we experience full engagement, optimal performance, good health and increasing happiness. This state comes about when an individual or group have clear goals, high challenge, immediate perceived ability to deliver, absolute focus and are totally absorbed in the present.

A resilient person is fully engaged, has stamina for change and operates at peak performance because they:

- Are fulfilled and focused
- Spend more time in Flow
- Have less negative stress
- Know when to rest, recharge, reengage
- Have increased energy
- Spend more time in positive emotion
- Are emotionally intelligent
- Reframe thinking and generate opportunity and optimism in times of pressure or crisis
- Understand and enacts their values and passions
- Periodically reinvent themselves (self, work and life) by taking on new challenges and opportunities

Increasing the resilience of leaders and staff leads to organisational resilience and a high trust, high performance culture. This has been shown to have a significant impact on an organisation's shareholder return through higher productivity, reduced costs, sales, customer satisfaction, and employee retention.

Measuring Resilience



At Springfox, our approach to Resilience is integral, evidence-based and practical. The Resilience Model is made up of 11 categories defined as either *Asset* (resilience building) or *Liability* (resilience detracting). In the top half of Resilience Model, we discover a whole new perspective on life, self, purpose and authenticity as we integrate body, heart, mind and spirit culminating in a self-actualised person consistently putting their Spirit into Action.

Our Resilience Diagnostic tool (see www.springfox.com) provides a self-assessment measure of how your Resilience Assets may balance your Resilience Liabilities in our Resilience Model. We call this measure your Resilience Ratio and can be measured for both an individual and an aggregated team.

Highly resilient people have high *asset* scores and low *liability* scores.

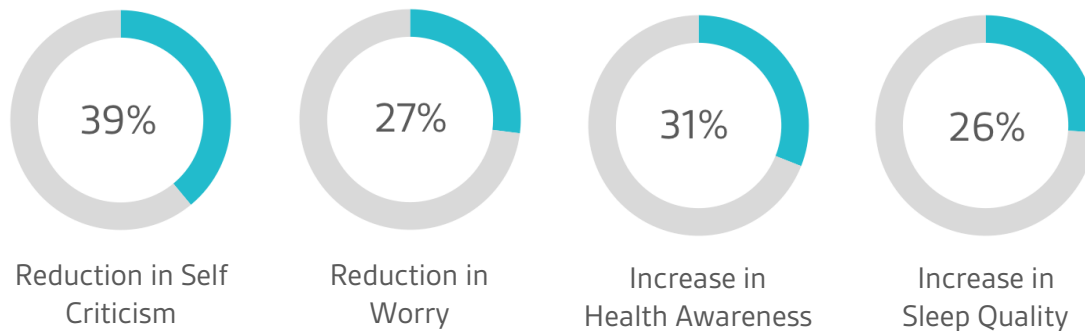
Our research to date suggests that resilient people (and high performance teams) have a resilience ratio of 2.5:1 or above.

Resilience scores across all categories consistently improve with training.

Resilience Training

Our study shows there were significant improvements across every category of resilience after resilience intervention – an average improvement in Resilience Ratio of 38%. The greatest gains were in physical (higher levels of sleep, nutrition, health awareness) and mental (reduced levels of self-criticism, hypervigilance and worry) and reduction in Distress and Depression. (Springfox/The ResilienceInstitute, 2018)

Research Results: Average percentage of individual improvement after training



Succumbing to Resilience Liabilities

Can you relate to this scenario?

Home at 7.30pm, numb, survive dinner, three hours watching the box - its 10.30pm. I feel tired – my body tells me to go to bed. I fight on to watch the next show. Midnight! I wake up on the couch, stumble to bed – I should go for a run in the morning – but I toss and turn for an hour! 6am swings around again, alarm shrieks, too tired, turn over, toss and turn, collapse... Wake up in a panic, rush to work, miss breakfast, strong coffee...here we go again! Why am I doing this?

The downward spiral begins with overload, loss of attention and **confusion**. Working memory is overloaded leading to **cognitive disengagement**, and consequent poor decisions, dullness and apathy. If this persists we start to **emotionally disengage (withdraw)** with self-doubt taking over. As neurobiologists demonstrate, disengagement, motivation and depleted energy are intertwined. The body is present but heart and mind are absent. Neglecting exercise, relaxation and sleep leads to physically **vulnerability**. We are exposed to **distress** (hyperventilation, insomnia and negativity) which is one path to **depression**.

Mitigating Resilience Liabilities (Risks)

We all descend into the downward spiral from time to time. This is normal and natural. Frequently, we spend longer than we need with these "liabilities" in our life. Bounce back is first, finding how to remove these liabilities from your life; and second, working out how to restore optimal performance following adversity.

Tackling Depression

Recovery begins with recognition and acceptance. Denial and "hard-man stonewalling" is the greatest obstacle. Get help! Start with your family doctor and make sure you have enough time to understand the options. Do not be afraid to seek alternative opinions. You must be comfortable and supportive of your treatment plan.

- SSRI or other anti-depressant medication
- Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) – with an accredited psychologist
- Support groups and counselling
- Lifestyle rejuvenation

Recovery usually begins within 10 days to three weeks and after 6 months of normal function you might consider yourself recovered. There is strong support for well-structured lifestyle discipline right from the beginning (Sarris, 2014). Stop alcohol and drugs. While it can be hard to motivate oneself in depression, find a way to get regular exercise, eat well, practice relaxation and find joy, gratitude and appreciation in your daily activities.

Dissolving Distress

The key is to understand how your body signals distress. These symptoms include: headaches, muscle pain, digestive disorders, chest pain, skin rashes, allergies, sleep disturbance, irritability and worry. These symptoms alert us to extreme overload and the beginning of body/mind failure. The goal is to have no symptoms but many of us are so used to persistent symptoms we consider them "normal" and pay little attention.

- Deliberate, slow diaphragmatic breathing practice
- Facilitated relaxation (massage, yoga, tai chi)
- Daily meditation, prayer and exercise
- Stop alcohol and drugs
- Lifestyle rejuvenation

Reducing Vulnerability

We become vulnerable when we forget to take care of ourselves. You have to be strong to help others.

- Take a proper holiday
- Build exercise, good nutrition, sleep and relaxation into each day
- Plan to take frequent weekend breaks (no work, phones, e-mail)

Reconnecting from Withdrawal

Withdrawal is a natural response to overload, error and failure. It is easy to recovery from provided you reconnect with those who matter to you.

- Talk to someone even if you have to pay
- Connect with older and wiser people or find a coach or mentor
- Make time for those who matter (partner, children, parents, friends)
- Re-establish a regular 'me time' (hobby, friends, sport)

Re-engage from Disengagement

Build a daily practice of relaxation or mindfulness. Learn to take short, effective relaxation breaks during tasks, which can include:

- Breathe with the diaphragm – low and slow
- Regular, long exhalations followed by a pause
- Work in short, super-focused bursts
- Stretch breaks, sunshine, activity, coffee or protein snack

Clear the fog of Confusion

- Focus on one task at a time
- Delete what is not important
- Delegate everything you can
- Sharpen your priority list to no more than five issues

Building Resilience Assets - Organisation

- Strategic purpose, values and priorities – be clear, communicate well and reward accordingly.
- Recruiting - Recruit staff with the right skills to do the job
- Challenge – Promote and empower staff to stretch and be challenged such that innovation is fostered rather than hitting overload.
- Resilience Skills - Develop leadership and staff skills around resilience and thriving
- Sustainability - Understand that peak performance is not the same as sustainable high performance. Pace of change is critical. How many projects is the organisation undertaking? Is the organisation experiencing change fatigue? If there are too many “strategic” priorities, nothing will be achieved and staff will suffer or become cynical or disengaged. Most importantly, what does the organisation need to stop doing to allow sustainability and innovation.
- Social awareness - Be aware of when staff do show early signs of overload and provide coaching support
- “Trust Culture” (Hurley, 2006) – 50% of staff don't trust their leaders. A damning statistic that must be addressed. A prime cause of distress and disengagement. Drive a culture of high trust, low politics and “failure is OK” through strong communication, compassion and intolerance for non-values-based behaviour. In this environment, staff feel it is OK to push back on excessive workload or delete/ delegate/prioritise.

Building Resilience Assets - Personal

As one learns to identify, up-skill and apply your resilience assets, life becomes more fun and successful. Resilience training helps people to build these assets. Here is a short list of practices to lift your Resilience Ratio over 3:1 and help you enjoy the fruits of Resilience.



Specific Tips for Building Resilience Assets

"Many of us now work in constantly connected, always-on, highly demanding work cultures where stress and the risk of burnout are widespread. Since the pace and intensity of contemporary work culture are not likely to change, it's more important than ever to build resilience skills to effectively navigate your work life."

(Harvard Business Review, 2016)

Master Stress

We can and should seek to create an environment that fosters positive stress leading to sustainable high performance. Equally important is to educate self and staff on the causation of stress. Stress only exists when an individual perceives a gap between a challenge and their ability to reach that challenge IN THE FUTURE. E.g. Stress from running late for the meeting or pending tax bill or dubious cash flow forecast. Choosing to let that future threat fester can lead to sleepless nights and the start of the downward spiral. A resilient person will either reframe the thought to improve perspective OR return to the present and seek help to resolve the threat.

- ◆ **Breathe** - When in doubt, breathe out.
- ◆ **Be Present** - Challenge the future forecast that is causing stress and return to the present.

Energise Body – invest in self

The stress hormone cortisol is a powerful agent. When built up through ongoing distress and poor lifestyle, it leaves us on a downward spiral when facing life's challenges. A resilient lifestyle is key to building "match fitness".

- ◆ **Exercise** - Enjoy a 10 min stretch at wake up time.
- ◆ **Sleep** - Maintain same wake up time, avoid caffeine after 2pm. Prepare for sleep with a brain "cool down" with no screen exposure, at least 1 hour before bed.
- ◆ **Nutrition** - Resist the temptation of sugar and unhealthy, snack cravings. Replace with nuts, fruit, or low GI alternatives. Challenge yourself to eat more vegetables and fruit.
- ◆ **Integral Practice** - Define and engage in non-negotiable daily practices that energise you.

Engage Emotion – be optimistic (really!)

A resilient person is able to view their world with a mindset of realistic optimism. Unfortunately, during tough times, this style can shift to pessimism (most depression is a thinking disease!!) or delusional optimism (unwarranted risk-taking). It is very difficult to observe one's thinking style with a busy, frantic mind. So, the starting point is practising mindfulness.

- ◆ **Positivity** - List and reflect on all the positive actions and experiences from your day.
- ◆ **Empathy** - Take time to deeply understand the perspectives of others.
- ◆ **Connection** - Reach out to others.

Spirit in Action

Resilience is ultimately anchored by doing activities which you are passionate about AND playing to your strengths. When I am in this space I have both calm and high performance. I am in Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014) – a place of total absorption where my strengths are equal to the challenge resulting in joy, success, satisfaction. This state clearly applies to leaders and staff.

- ◆ **Values** – Be clear on your life purpose. Walk your talk and take action that honours what matters most to you.
- ◆ **Compassion** - Lead self and others with care. Practice an attitude of "tough love" where appropriate.
- ◆ **Strengths** - Identify and explore one passionate strength.

References

- American Psychological Association. (2017, February 21). *How Does Stress Affect Us?* Retrieved from Psych Central: <https://psychcentral.com/lib/how-does-stress-affect-us/>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2008). *National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing: Summary of Results*. Commonwealth of Australia.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2014). *Flow and the foundations of positive psychology*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Hansen, S. (2015). *Inside-Out*. Auckland, NZ: The Resilience Institute.
- Harvard Business Review. (2016, June). *5 Ways to Boost Your Resilience at Work*. Retrieved from Harvard Business Review: <https://hbr.org/2016/06/627-building-resilience-ic-5-ways-to-build-your-personal-resilience-at-work>
- Hurley, R. F. (2006, September). The Decision to Trust. *Harvard Business Review*.
- Kessler, R. C., Berglund, P., Demler, O., Jin, R., Merikangas, K. R., & Walters, E. E. (2005). Lifetime prevalence and ago-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in The National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *62*(6), 593-602.
- Sarris, J. O. (2014). Lifestyle medicine for depression. *BMC Psychiatry*, *14*, 1-13. Retrieved from Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/two-takes-depression/201607/the-importance-purpose>
- Sheppes, G., Scheibe, S., Suri, G., Radu, P., Blechert, J., & Gross, J. J. (2014, February). Emotion regulation choice: A conceptual framework and supporting evidence. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, *143*(1), 163-181.
- Springfox/The ResilienceInstitute. (2018). *Resilience Enables Strategic Agility: Global Resilience Report 2018*. Auckland: The Resilience Institute.
- Taylor, S. (2013). *Assertive Humility*. Carlton North: Monterey Press.

About The Author - Stuart Taylor



Stuart's ultimate purpose is helping people and organisations, typically through leadership and senior teams, shift into a more compassionate space in order to reach sustainable high performance. This top-down approach, across a wide range of clients in the corporate, government and education sectors, is led by Stuart's belief that organisational culture can operate with an increasing emphasis on humanity.

Stuart is committed to achieving high quality outcomes for our clients. Since 2003, Stuart has engaged and inspired with his workshops, keynotes and conference presentations to more than 20,000 people globally.

A diagnosis of brain cancer in 2002 led Stuart on a personal journey back to health. Stuart became a strong advocate for incorporating cultural practices into organisations to nurture wellbeing. In 2003 he founded The Resilience Institute in Australia to share his experience and philosophy with people and organisations.

His diversity of qualifications in psychology, finance, IT and aeronautical engineering bring a breadth of credibility and perspective to client situations.

Stuart is acknowledged as a strong and empathic speaker, facilitator, and executive coach who uses his expertise, humility and humour to engage participants. His purpose is to help people and organisations shift into a more compassionate space in order to reach sustainable high performance.

In 2013, Stuart published *Assertive Humility – Emerging from the Ego Trap*.

CEO Springfox

E: stuart.taylor@springfox.com

P: +61 3 95092881

W: www.springfox.com

Y: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ADvge_5POg&feature=youtu.be

