

## BUILDING RESILIENCE DURING THE LOCKDOWN

Having been in lockdown for almost seven weeks now we are facing an uncertain future complicated by unknowns and fears. This is arguably one of the most stressful and anxiety provoking situations any of us has had to face on a global level. Our instinct is to shelter ourselves and our families from life's hardships. However, now it seems impossible to do so. Finding a sense of individualised mastery to manage the challenges, there is a way that we can help shape our emotional and psychological wellbeing and that is by harnessing our most powerful resource - **resilience**.

Resilience is about our own, inherent and natural ability to withstand adversity and challenges and to bounce back. Resilience is understanding that while we may be temporarily set back, upset and distressed, we have the ability to recover and be stronger than ever. Of course it is natural to feel sad and afraid sometimes, but recognising our resilience is appreciating that we will not remain that way. We have a natural capacity for recovery. That is the essence of resilience.

Resilience is what gives people the ability to recover from a trauma or crisis with as little disruption to our lives as possible. A person's innate resilience strengthens over time and as we learn to recognise and appreciate it, we can rely on the inevitability that we will recover, as we always do. Resilience gives us the ability to face challenges in life, like the coronavirus lockdown, while knowing, for sure, that we have the God-given capacity to recoup our energy and positivity.

Let us consider Nelson Mandela. He was imprisoned under appalling conditions for 27 years. He was allowed only one visitor annually, could only write and receive only two letters a year, and was forced to do hard labour. Did this crush him? No, on the contrary it did the opposite. Nelson Mandela's innate resilience grew and developed and ultimately saw him through these ghastly 27 years. In fact he became more motivated than ever to succeed in his life. We can take inspiration from Nelson Mandela from the way he chose to respond to his dire circumstances. He chose to rise up, to stand above, and not to become a victim of his circumstances. He developed resilience and faced his situation with strength and courage. How can we take inspiration from Mandela and develop resilience?

**Below are 10 tips:**

## **1. Use the stress container model to identify factors that reduce your stress levels**

Think about your stress as being held inside a container. How do we avoid letting this container fill up and spill over with stress? Visualise water as being your stress inside your container, identify coping mechanisms that will keep your stress container from filling up too much, and overflowing. Think about which of the things on this list you can focus on, and try not to demand too much for yourself, combating each stressful thought with one or more of the below:

- Getting enough sleep
- Eating a balanced diet
- Performing physical activity
- Defining your role, responsibilities or boundaries
- Defining success
- Developing a sense of contribution and excellence - doing something productive and/or meaningful each day to help combat stress levels resulting from boredom for example. By doing something meaningful for yourself, or others you develop a sense of contribution about your day, i.e. a sense of achievement, no matter how small.
- Adopting a can-do mindset
- Setting and achieving realistic daily goals
- Practicing mindfulness - this includes spending as little as 15 minutes each day to focus on the here and now - the present, and in doing so practicing some breathing exercises, reflecting on what you can be grateful for in this moment.
- Maximising laughter, fun and positivity

## **2. Identify how you are spending your time differently now that we are on lockdown**

Draw a circle that represents your day and think about how you divide it up. What proportion is sleep, work, connection, activities and exercise? How does this compare with how you are spending your time on the weekend? How does this look now compared to before lockdown? Once you've identified what you're doing with your time, you might be more realistic with how you divide it up going forward and let go of things you don't need to be doing. We only have 24 hours in the day, and it's important that we take time for ourselves. It's not selfish, it's a way to build resilience. If we neglect ourselves we cannot build resilience.

## **3. Set boundaries between work and your personal life**

While working from home set clear boundaries between work and home responsibilities. Do not feel that just because you are working from home you now need to be available 24/7. Switch off your laptop, computer, and email notifications

once you are done with work for the day. Allow yourself to disconnect & reconnect with your loved ones or hobbies.

#### **4. Give yourself permission to spend time thinking about yourself and what's important to you**

Lockdown is giving us time to think about ourselves and what we potentially want for our futures. This sounds much easier than it is, but it will take a lot of time. Time at home might give us time to think about our core values and how we can live our lives in line with these. This will in turn help us to feel more fulfilled and reach a level of contentment. Building resilience is also about thinking of your own needs and how we can meet these needs. This is not selfish but rather a strength.

#### **5. Make a list of what you have achieved in this short time**

Include what you've learned about yourself and skills you've developed. These can be things that only matter to you or could even be things that might bolster a CV or job application. You'll be surprised how much you've learned in just a few weeks. This is especially important when considering how much you have gained from an emotional perspective- reflect on how you have adapted during these last few weeks. It's been hard, but is it not amazing that on a whole we have all adapted to this new normal. Reflect on the inner resilience that you never knew you had.

#### **6. Work out how to control your anxiety**

Rather than sit with your anxiety all day long and succumb to your fears, embrace your anxiety by firstly acknowledging it, then figuring out what you can do about it, and then deciding how to minimise it, even if only for that day or moment. Think back to point 1 above - do not allow your stress container to overflow, the same must be applied for your anxiety container. Try empty it out and learn ways in which you can control this anxiety.

#### **7. Try to make sense out of the chaos of your day**

Sitting at the end of the day and thinking what you've managed to achieve and are grateful for can be helpful. These achievements or feelings and thoughts of gratitude can be small, like getting out to do your daily exercise as a walk or a run. Rather than focusing on the negative aspects, think about the positives and use them to inform what you might hope to get out of the next day.

## **8. Talk to yourself in the mirror**

Sound crazy? Perhaps but research has shown that positive self-talk and encouragement can be very helpful. While our thoughts can get self-critical and remain in this loop, it can be easier not to give yourself a hard time when you speak out loud and stop this self-critical or negative loop by actually hearing the words out loud.

## **9. Talk to other people about their expectations**

If you are working from home, this might mean having a chat with your manager, other members of your team, or other colleagues. If you are home with family members, talk to them about how you will divide up responsibilities so that no one is overwhelmed. Clarifying expectations - those you have of yourself, and those that others have of you, will go a long way in reducing stress and anxiety and helping you to productively face your day.

## **10. Turn to your community and community resources - don't be alone**

Reach out to members of the community and find useful resources they are offering. Check out the range of resources we are offering on our website [www.jhbchev.co.za](http://www.jhbchev.co.za) and visit the COVID-19 resources page.

Think about someone - like Nelson Mandela - who you can take inspiration from to help you on your journey of building resilience.

