Part I

The Exceptional Nature of Leadership Resilience

1 Bounce Forward

Mike S. is the former superintendent of a large school district on the East Coast. He has been retired now for many years, but he is still widely regarded by the citizens of the city, as well as the wider educational community, as the individual who led this school district out of darkness. Over a decade ago, when Mike first stepped in, the district was plagued by low expectations for students and low student performance, especially for African Americans and students from families of meager means. By the time he retired, eight years later, the district and its students were flourishing. The percentage of students who were learning at high levels and earning awards and career opportunities and scholarships to further their education had reached unprecedented levels. Faculty, staff, and community confidence and morale had increased correspondingly, producing a "can do" climate that engendered innovation and collaboration.

During the early days of the district's transformation under Mike's leadership, Laura, one of the district principals, told me about a specific event when she first recognized Mike's remarkable leadership resilience. Laura told me that Mike made a presentation to a deeply divided school board, recommending an increase of personnel and other resources to provide rapid remediation for students needing extra learning time and instruction—many of whom attended Laura's school. Laura said, "Not only was the school board divided and giving Mike the third degree, but they had rallied community groups to show up and give him a hard time too." According to Laura, whose high-need campus was a lightning rod for the conversation, while she and other district administrators could not believe the voraciousness with which the board and community attacked Mike and his recommendation, Mike himself was steady, calm, and unwavering in his arguments and recommendation. He never reacted to the rude comments and personal attacks, even as the meeting went on late into the night.

But what Laura remembers most is that the next morning, when she and the rest of the faculty arrived early at their campus to debrief the previous

evening's board meeting, there was Mike, greeting them with a smile, an enormous box of donuts, and a jug of coffee. The effect of Mike's resilience on Laura and on her faculty was powerful and set the tone for a high level of resilience throughout the organization. Laura said, "Everything about Mike showing up in the morning to help us debrief the board meeting gave us strength and forbearance. The donuts and coffee reminded us that life goes on, and contentious board meetings would not derail us. The refreshments added a celebratory tone to the meeting, which was a complete switch from the heavy 'post-mortem' tone we might have expected. The fact that Mike was there at all, and not hiding out in his office or sleeping in for that matter, after such a late night, set the expectation that not only will we withstand resistance, but through collaboration and simply making it OK to talk about it, we were capable of more than we first imagined."

THE OUTCOMES OF LEADERSHIP RESILIENCE

Instinctively, most leaders will say that resilience helps them adopt a positive perspective in the face of adversity. But the benefits of leadership resilience produce much more than a positive and optimistic disposition; it is also essential to reaching goals and to achieving organizational outcomes. Before reading the list in the Benefits of Leadership Resilience box, jot your own bulleted list of the benefits of leadership resilience to you and your organization. How does your list compare with the ideas presented?

BENEFITS OF LEADERSHIP RESILIENCE

1. Resilience is a proactive way to respond to disruptive change, challenges, and adversity.

2. Resilience establishes a culture of achievement. It helps you sustain your focus on school and district outcomes.

3. Resilient leaders get things done. When they say they are going to do something they stick with it, and they follow through and this builds their reputations as trustworthy leaders.

4. Resilient leaders are valued employees for their record of accomplishment, and may receive opportunities and promotions over their less resilient but otherwise qualified peers.

5. Resilience helps you manage the stress that naturally occurs around change initiatives.

6. Your resilience sets a cultural example for the next generation of leaders. How you respond to adversity creates a template for how the organization and community responds to adversity.

7. Persistence in problem solving often leads to breakthrough thinking, creativity, ingenuity, and innovation.

8. Resilience makes leadership visible. Controversy and challenges are defining moments for leaders—people watch how you respond during times of adversity, and they form enduring impressions to define you from that point forward.

Leaders like Mike S. (from the story presented above) appear to have a knack for responding to adversity and unexpected change with maturity, equanimity, grace, courage, and pluck. But highly resilient leaders like Mike could not repeatedly face such daunting scenarios and reap the benefits of leadership resilience without experiencing what it feels like to do so. Thankfully, whether or not we become highly resilient leaders, we all possess ordinary resilience, which helps us get our foot into the door. Ordinary resilience helps leaders stay in the game long enough to grow the deeper levels of resilience required by the demands of leadership.

ORDINARY RESILIENCE

Before we leap into our exploration of leadership resilience, I want to briefly set the stage by first laying out what it means to have ordinary resilience; what it means to *bounce back* in the aftermath of challenges and disruptive change.

The American Psychological Association (APA) captures the essence of resilience in this definition: "Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of stress—such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors. It means 'bouncing back' from difficult experiences" (APA, 2002). Like the APA, many contemporary researchers of resilience highlight the role of adaptation in resilience and explore what it means to bounce back. A highly regarded researcher on bereavement and resilience, George Bonanno (2009) elaborates on the process of adapting well by describing resilient people as those who bounce back and continue forward in life with a sense of core purpose and meaning. Expanding the scope of resilience beyond individuals, researchers Zolli and Healy (2012) define resilience as "the capacity of a system, enterprise, or a person to maintain its core purpose and integrity in the face of dramatically changed

circumstances" (p. 126). Writing about resilience in young people, Clay, Knibbs, and Joseph (2009) say resilience is "the ability to continue to function normally in spite of adversity" (p. 413), and Scales, Benson, Leffert, and Blyth (2000) describe it as the ability to overcome negative events and quickly return to pretrauma levels of functioning.

Given the widely accepted definition of resilience as the ability to bounce back and carry on with life, what might seem amazing is the fact that most people *are* resilient even in the face of significant loss and challenge.

Beautifully Ordinary

In their book about why people, organizations, systems, and entire communities bounce back in the aftermath of hardship, Andrew Zolli and Ann Marie Healey (2012) relate early investigations in the field of psychological resilience and explain why we are often surprised to learn that most of us are, in fact, quite resilient. Zolli and Healy tell us that initially, resilience research focused on children who were survivors of the Nazi concentration camps or offspring of schizophrenic parents. Many of these children went on to live good and productive lives, in spite of their harsh experiences. Dominated by Freud's theory that grief is a lengthy and treacherous process, however, the social psychologists that studied these children believed they were witnessing "superkids" who were blessed with an unusual ability to cope. But one researcher, named Ann Masten, pointed out that while it certainly was amazing that these children thrived in the face of such hardship, it was not *unusual* that they did so. The reason, Masten said, is the presence of "basic human adaptational systems" (Zolli & Healy, 2012, p. 122) that predispose all of us for bouncing back.

Resilience in Common

Again, according to the APA (2002), "Research has shown that resilience is ordinary, not extraordinary. People commonly demonstrate resilience. One example is the response of many Americans to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and individuals' efforts to rebuild their lives." Martin Seligman, who is often called the father of positive psychology and who leads a resiliency training program for the United States military, says that how people respond to adversity is normally distributed, with the majority of people falling in the middle (2011b). In the middle are the resilient people—those who experienced a hardship but who bounced back physically and psychologically to where they were before the trauma. According to Seligman, on the lower end of the curve are the people who develop posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and at the opposite end are those individuals who eventually experience posttraumatic growth.

George Bonanno's longitudinal studies on resilience after tragedies, such as natural disasters, the SARS epidemic, or even personal losses, reveal similar

findings: Only about one-third of the population experiences PTSD while the rest either bounce back or show little effect to begin with. Posttraumatic growth experts Calhoun and Tedeschi (1995) are even more optimistic. They tell us that anywhere between 30% and up to 90% of the population actually experience growth eventually, as a result of facing serious trauma.

Interestingly, Zolli and Healy say that the fact that the percentage of people who display resilience is greater than the percentage of people who display signs of PTSD or other maladaptive responses to challenges suggests that this natural design "ensures that there is always at least a sizable minority or even a majority, to take care of those deeply affected by trauma" (2012, p. 127).

What It Means to Be Resilient

Bouncing back is seen in what individuals do in the aftermath of disruptive change, particularly in the capacity they have to navigate toward resources that restore them after a setback (Zautra, Hall, & Murray, 2010). Resources might be physical, such as taking on a second job to mitigate a financial blow or installing rails in the bathroom to aid mobility after an illness. They could be social, such as establishing a new relationship or alliance with someone who can provide support, or they could be psychological, such as seeking out a therapist or learning how to reframe negative thoughts.

Being resilient does not mean that people do not feel distress, sadness, or anger. In fact, even people who are ultimately strengthened by adversity may first traverse through a period of time looking decidedly non-resilient, perhaps even feeling depressed or anxious or even turning to drugs and alcohol. But in general, we see resiliency in the capacity of people to navigate toward resources that allow them to absorb relatively high levels of disruptive change while exhibiting minimal unproductive behaviors that impede their ability to function.

The idea that resiliency is seen in people who experience setbacks but who cope and adjust so that they can return to their previous state of normal functioning lends credence to the visual image of people "bouncing back." The ability to bounce back from life's curve balls is what helps us make it through another day.

Factors That Mediate Resilience

The factors that promote resilience are many and varied, providing countless pathways for its development. A few prominent factors that appear in the literature include personality traits such as optimism and confidence (Bonanno, 2009; Bonanno, Galea, Bucciareli, & Vlahov, 2007; Seligman, 2011a), perceptions of control, feeling empowered to act, perceptions of the harm caused as a result of adversity and the extent to which it was intentional and permanent

(Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006), having self-agency to make plans and leverage resources in one's direction and delay immediate reward in order to achieve future goals (APA, 2002; Block & Block, 1980), the presence of strong social networks, mindfulness meditation and cognitive reframing, the ability to regulate emotions, thinking and believing that one has a meaningful purpose in life, that one can influence their surroundings, and that negative experiences can indeed lead to learning and growth (Kobasa, 1979).

According to Zolli and Healy (2012), personal resilience is a habit. They say, "Whether cultivated through wise mentors, vigorous exercise, access to green space, or a particularly rich relationship with faith, the habits of personal resilience are habits of mind—making them habits we can cultivate and change when armed with the right resources" (p. 130).

LEADERSHIP RESILIENCE

To my extreme mortification I grow wiser every day.

—Lady Mary Wortley Montagu

Fortified with this foundational understanding that resilience is quite ordinary—that most of us are blessed with basic human systems of adaptation that allow us to soldier on in spite of incredible adversity—then what makes leadership resilience different? Why do leaders need to cultivate a type of resilience that is anything more or anything different from ordinary resilience?

The simple answers to these questions are found in the extraordinary demands of leadership within complex, ambiguous, and constantly changing systems. Bottom line: If ordinary resilience is *bouncing back* and resuming the path one has been on, then leadership resilience is *bouncing forward* and leading not just oneself, but others, into new and ambiguous realities. Following the famous words of Yogi Berra who reportedly advised, "When you reach a fork in the road, take it," leadership resilience is seen as your ability to make the most of every fork in the road and inspire others to walk with you with confidence.

Faster and Stronger

Given that most people are in fact resilient, it should come as no surprise that most leaders are resilient too. What may be interesting to learn, however, is that some people, including successful leaders, are more resilient than others. In his book *The Resiliency Advantage: Master Change, Thrive Under Pressure, and Bounce Back From Setbacks* (2005), the late Al Siebert compares people who are highly resilient to those who linger or remain in less resilient states, where they feel victimized by the circumstances of life. Siebert writes, "Highly resilient people are flexible, adapt to new circumstances

quickly, and thrive in constant change. Most important, they expect to bounce back and feel confident that they will. They have a knack for creating good luck out of circumstances that many others see as bad luck" (p. 2).

Based on Siebert's observations, my research illuminates similar qualities of highly resilient individuals. Since 2009, I've been looking at data from leaders who complete an inventory that I use in my leadership coaching and consulting practice. The inventory provides a snapshot of an individual's status with regard to certain leadership choices necessary to facilitate sustainable change—perhaps the most challenging demand of leadership. Leadership resilience is one of the seven choices evaluated in this inventory. (The other choices are renewal, resonance, relationships, reality, recognition, and reciprocity. You can take the entire online version at www.WisdomOut.com, or you can take the individual assessments provided in this book.) In addition to exploring levels of the seven characteristics, the inventory also asks participants to rate themselves on a scale of 1 to 10 for happiness and meaningful work.

What I have found is that leaders who rate themselves high on happiness and engagement in meaningful work also score in the "amazingly resilient" category of resilience 70% more often than participants who rate themselves low on happiness and engagement in meaningful work. Effective and happy leaders are so darn resilient, in fact, that they might even appear to others to be immune to fearsome forces of nature. Extraordinarily resilient people do seem to operate with a certain amount of indifference to life's travails (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006). These findings, combined with the stories of leadership resilience that I gather from my fieldwork, confirm what others are saying about the resilience of successful leaders: They respond faster, stronger, wiser, and with a greater amount of pluck and good cheer than leaders who are not as successful.

Resilience Inventory

Bearing in mind that resilience can be learned, the following inventory will provide you with a current snapshot of your *personal* resilience (for a computerized administration of this inventory, log on to www.WisdomOut.com, and click on "Assessments"). You can take this inventory several times per year—perhaps once every quarter—as a way to focus on different facets of resilience. (Note: If you are reading this book as a leadership team, replace "I" with "We.")

Instructions: Respond to each of the statements in Exercise 1.1 quickly, providing your first impulse as the answer. If you are responding as a team, look at the average response or look at the amount of responses for each number in the range. A response of 10 is the strongest possible agreement, and 1 is the strongest possible disagreement. There are no correct answers. However, the inventory will be most useful to you if you provide the most authentic response, and that is likely to be the first response that comes to mind.

Exercise 1.1 The Personal Resilience Inventory

Statement	Strongly Disagree									Strongly Agree
1. Almost every week, I encounter a situation that is past my breaking point. I don't know if I can bounce back from it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2. When I encounter failure, the causes are almost always factors beyond my control.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3. When I suffer professional disappointments, I doubt I can ever make it up to my boss, team, or my organization.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4. The last time I suffered a personal loss such as the loss of a friend, partner, or family member, I felt life could never be as good as it once was.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5. If I ask for help from colleagues, they will know that I am incapable of doing adequate work on my own.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6. When I encounter silence in relationships, it usually means that the other person is disappointed or angry with me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7. When I think of tragic events in the news or in history, most of them were just unavoidable.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8. The significant changes that have happened in my life were usually caused by forces outside my control.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9. In the past year, I have attempted to make a major personal change, but outside influences prevented me from following through on it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10. In the past year, I have thought about or attempted to make an important professional change, but I could not get the support from organizations and those "in charge" to make it work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Total score: _____

Reflection on Your Score: With a pen or highlighter, flag the sentences below that "speak to you" for whatever reason. Some sentences may seem "right on target." Others might seem off the mark. Don't dismiss the "off the mark" sentences immediately. Instead, reflect alone or with a trusted person or leadership coach about what they might mean.

Interpreting Your Score

Where do highly resilient leaders tend to score on the Resilience Inventory? Leaders who take the online version of the Resilience Inventory, and who also rate themselves high on happiness and meaningful work, score most often in the range of 0–25.

If You Scored in the Range of 0–25: You are an amazingly resilient person. When you encounter disappointments, you bounce back quickly and you hit the ground running. Likely, you are confident in your ability to learn from experience and feel almost certain that you can influence the results the next time. This doesn't mean you avoid the adversities of life, but you are able to see adversity as an opportunity for growth and change. This strong confidence in your ability and healthy skepticism of the influences of the outside world will generally serve you well. However, others may sometimes see your confidence as indifference to the forces of nature and society. Therefore, you must not forget that others around you may not be as resilient as you are. Find out how you can help to mitigate the impact of adversity for those around you. Ask what they need, and provide resources and emotional support that help others who are less resilient find their way.

If You Scored in the Range of 26–50: You are a moderately resilient person, fairly confident in your abilities to withstand the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or at least of daily life. Your amiability and self-confidence are balanced by a healthy understanding of outside influences on your personal and professional success. In the face of disruption, however, your equinimity is not always balanced with action in response to new realities. Others may interpret this inconsistency as a sign that you do not always see the connection between events and your role in events or in your agency to respond to events. You will benefit from clarifying your analysis of situations and expressing your perceptions to those around you. For example, when you encounter a disappointment, it will be helpful if you articulate clearly where your personal responsibility begins and the impact of outside forces ends, and commit to actions within your circle of influence and control.

If You Scored in the Range of 51–75: You will benefit from an explicit focus on improving your personal resilience. Your life experiences have influenced your thought patterns in a troubling way, robbing you of

confidence in your own abilities to influence your future. This can create a sense of fatalism that becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy. If you think things cannot improve, then they probably will not. If you believe that your influence on events around you is limited, then you will probably be correct. You would benefit from focusing on some very short-term (one- to four-day) objectives in which you can demonstrate your ability to influence your own life and have an impact on events around you. Rather than pursue an overwhelmingly large objective and risk disappointment, consider the pursuit of a series of small victories. The cumulative effect of them might surprise you.

If You Scored in the Range of 76–100: You have suffered serious personal and professional setbacks, and because you are convinced that these disappointments are beyond your control, you are heading toward a future of despair unless you take serious and immediate corrective action. Your support structure at home and at work may have abandoned you, as your cloud of bleak disappointment tends to scare away those who might try to offer assistance. While you may think that you are simply being open and honest about the way the world is, your views can strike others as bleak and foreboding, and therefore even people who care about you do not spend much time around you. That makes for a very lonely and disappointing life, which worsens the cycle of solitude, anger, and cynicism in which you find yourself. Fortunately, there are skills you can develop that will lead to resilience and renewal, but this will require some intense focus and concentration on a daily, even an hourly, basis. You will need to check your thought patterns for accuracy and engage in resilience exercises that will allow you to demonstrate your impact on your life and on the world around you. You deserve to have a much happier life than you have right now.

More Like Posttraumatic Growth

Resilient leaders also tend to be highly resilient individuals. These individuals sustain an aura of leadership in the face of adversity *and* they bounce forward quickly; they regain their footing and they hit the ground running. The ability to be highly resilient *and* bounce forward into new realities makes leadership resilience closer to what we see in the phenomenon known as posttraumatic growth rather than ordinary resilience. Like posttraumatic growth, which involves movement beyond pretrauma levels of adaptation (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), leadership resilience has a quality of transformation about it—it is not about staying the same, it is about becoming better as a result of the hardship. This is growth that requires a transformed perspective—one that emerges only after assumptions have been challenged, broken down, and revealed. Transformation from adversity is a coveted prize.

Positive Effects of Negative Events

Coined by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996), the term posttraumatic growth deals with the surprisingly positive effects that come from negative events. According to Tedeschi and Calhoun, the positive effects resulting from posttraumatic growth show up in five forms: (1) a sense that because of the crisis, new opportunities and possibilities have emerged; (2) how people see relationships, including a greater appreciation for people and a sense of being closer to them; (3) a greater sense of efficacy, confidence, and strength; (4) a greater appreciation for life overall, including a broader philosophy about what matters and a greater sense of fulfillment and meaning; and (5) deepened spirituality or a significant change in one's belief system.

Such is the case of Beth, a novice middle school principal who got off on the wrong foot with key members of her administrative team, resulting in their request to transfer to other schools. Beth was understandably upset about the situation and recognized the accrued gaffes she made that led to the team's disenchantment with her. She told me, "Although I can't make the two assistant principals stay and give me another chance, I can move forward from this point, learn from my mistakes, and be a better leader for the new team coming in." Beth added, "Sure, my confidence was shaken and I was even afraid I might be demoted. But I reached out to the people around me and now I know that the only way to get things accomplished as a leader is through others. The bigger lesson here is that this is exactly what we teach our students. I'm embarrassed to think that I was not the best role model for working well with others. Thank goodness I have a compassionate supervisor who wants me to succeed and will coach me through this. She even invited me to come to a panel discussion at a regional conference for novice leaders."

When we analyze Beth's story through the lens of posttraumatic growth, we can see each element at work:

A Sense of New Possibilities and Opportunities. Beth looks forward to being a better leader in the second year of her principalship. Also, Beth is astonished to find that instead of ostracizing her, her supervisor actually invited her to a conference where she can learn and grow.

Changes in Relationships With Others. The vulnerability that Beth felt when she found herself facing this leadership challenge caused her to reach out to others. Self-disclosure about the situation and how she feels about it activated a network of people, including her supervisor who could introduce new and different points of view out of which will help her make better future decisions. Beth's willingness to accept help makes her more collaborative, and in Beth's case increases her sensitivity about the importance of relationships overall and poignantly those with her leadership team.

Perceived Change in Self With Greater Efficacy and Confidence. Beth expresses feeling more confident and able to act on the lessons she learned. She feels that the way she came through this challenge makes her a better leader. She is more experienced, more self-assured, and feels confident she will face future difficulties with competence, collaboration, and compassion.

Changes in Philosophy. Although Beth will not have a second chance with her first leadership team (since two members transferred to different schools), she is deeply appreciative that she has a chance to be a different kind of leader for the new team. When it comes to making leadership decisions now, collaboration with others is now at the top of Beth's list.

Deepened Spirituality or a Significant Change in One's Belief System. Beth returned to the fundamental values that brought her to the field of education in the first place—her commitment to students and to doing what is best for them.

Resilient leaders like Beth actually appear to thrive in conditions that bring others down—they become better because of the way they work through each adversity. They value learning in all forms and are especially bolstered by hard-won lessons. These insights do not rest as dormant and interesting pieces of information; they instead become key tenets for guiding new decisions. Leaders who demonstrate this high level of resilience exemplify the saying, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." This is the sort of leadership resilience that creates opportunity. It is more than steadiness in the face of adversity and stress—it is also the gumption to navigate toward sustaining resources that provide the grit required to actually transform the situation from one of hardship to one of opportunity.

It seems important at this point to emphasize that resilient leaders do not dodge adversity or escape the vagaries of life. Resilient leaders feel pain, become distressed, and some days they go home and cry. But they do exhibit high levels of resiliency, and they experience growth from the way they face adversity. They and others see them as having been made wiser by the challenge and the lessons learned.

THE REQUIREMENTS OF LEADERSHIP: WHAT MAKES LEADERSHIP RESILIENCE MORE CHALLENGING

When it comes to resilience, leaders bear a great responsibility. In the face of adversity, leaders must exhibit high levels of resilience and segue the resulting momentum into growth and change, not just for themselves, but for

the entire organization. Management expert Tom Peters even links behaviors that are decidedly resilient to the development of trust. He says, "But as a subordinate, I trust a leader who shows up, makes the tough calls, takes the heat, sleeps well amidst the furor, and then aggressively chomps into the next task in the morning with visible vitality" (Peters, 2001). As we saw through the story of Mike S. at the start of this chapter, the resilience of the leader influences the resilience of the people they lead. Like Mike, leaders must regain their leadership footing quickly, while they simultaneously lead forward into emerging and ambiguous realities.

The Vicissitudes of Complex Organizations

During times of adversity and change, leaders face strong organizational forces that create drag and make resilience development a priority. Resistance to these antagonistic forces is futile and even counterproductive. They are inherent to complex organizations and may even serve to create a level of suffering necessary to transformational change and posttraumatic growth. The best a leader can do then is to expect them, embrace them, and understand them. Consider this list of organizational forces that make resilience a leadership priority:

- You usually have little transition time between the challenging event and your next move—even when your next move is to mindfully take a step back and gather additional information.
- Progress must continue. You are expected to manage goals upward to achieve new levels of performance. This is true even when the resources you've depended on change, or are reduced or eliminated.
- You must lead others, many of whom are resistant to change, not through control and coercion, but through influence.
- The shared purpose and vision of the organization is yoked to your resilience—a reality that requires you to develop deep understanding about what it takes to promote organizational learning and growth.
- People expect more from leaders. Leaders must adhere to higher standards and expectations. Maladaptive responses during times of adversity open you to criticism and diminish your reputation.
- Your own sense of loss and disillusionment may be very great indeed. Even so, you must manage your own emotions and help the people around you manage theirs.
- The previous reality no longer exists or has been significantly altered. Therefore, to force a return to a previous existence is unhelpful and lacks courage. It is illusionary—not visionary.
- More often than not, you must step into new or emerging realities, and therefore must leverage resources for contexts that are still undefined, unstable, and ambiguous.

- In order to take advantage of the opportunities that emerge with change, you need to be more open to learning and be more open to having your assumptions and schemas changed.

THE STRESSES OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP: NEITHER RARE NOR UNUSUAL

In the aftermath of tragic acts of violence such as what happened at Columbine, Colorado, and more recently in Newtown, Connecticut, it is tempting to say that the world has become more dangerous, more untenable, more unkind. In truth the world is neither more benevolent nor more evil than it has ever been, and the people who populate it are capable of equal amounts of extraordinary kindness and disdain. This is how it is.

Resilience experts concur; adversity is neither rare nor unusual. When I think back to my first year and a half as a novice principal, I have to agree. Here are just a few of the disruptive challenges that in many ways were the crucibles of my first principalship:

- We opened and moved to a newly constructed school with reconstituted faculty, staff, and students.
- We attempted but failed to remove letter grades from the report card in grades K through 3.
- We rewrote the curriculum to reflect a new set of content standards, and a religious group protested when we explored outcome-based education.
- The fifth-grade classes found a person who died in the woods behind our school.
- Someone broke into the school and stole the safe from the main office, including all of our petty cash.
- We had an intruder alert and were forced to lock down the school for several hours when a rampaging father and son stormed through the neighborhood after robbing a local bank, with the state police in hot pursuit.
- A teacher filed a grievance against me because she thought I visited the classes too often.

To be sure, joy over-shadowed my first principalship much more than hardship ever could, but I share these examples to emphasize the truth in the statement that disruptive change is neither unusual nor rare.

Given the subjectivity of the causes of distress in education, it is impossible to fully enumerate and describe every trauma that could befall educational leaders now or in the future. The best we can do is lay out the broad

categories of such adversities and provide examples. Table 1.1 shows types and examples of adversities faced by educational leaders. As you see, some adversities are seismic to leaders both as human beings and within their leadership role. Other adversities are part and parcel of leadership—yet still could be perceived by individuals as either traumatic or passé, depending on the leader's capacity for resiliency.

Educational leaders are no different from the general population, and their resiliency has much to do with how they perceive and choose to frame the adversities they face. For any one of the educational leadership adversities presented in Table 1.1, leaders can choose to respond with resilience.

Table 1.1 Potential Adversities Facing Educational Leaders

Systemwide Seismic Trauma
• Hurricanes, tornados, and other natural disasters that destroy schools and communities
• Terrorism
• Campus intruder violence
• School violence committed by students
• The sudden and unexpected death of students or faculty/staff
• Unsafe schools: Bullying, gangs, and hate crimes
• Discrimination against subgroups of students
• Criminal charges against students or members of the faculty
Organizational Leadership Gauntlets
• Persistent gaps in student achievement and pervasive beliefs that not all students can learn
• Not reaching student achievement goals or closing achievement gaps
• Resistance to implementing the strategies of the organization
• Stakeholder resistance to change
• Anxiety in the face of implementation dips
• State and federal budget cuts
• Introduction of new laws, rules, and regulations
• Having to let go or pink-slip peers, colleagues, faculty, and staff
• Data that exposes favored illusions or challenges the current course of action

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- Having to reduce resources to programs and people

- Being the bearer of information that people find upsetting

- Having your school, district, or organization placed on an improvement list by an external standard board

- Loss of resources and support for programs

- New technologies and trends that require new operating paradigms

- Being reassigned

- Losing a team member to reassignment

- Miscommunications and misunderstandings between key people and groups

- Labor grievances and strikes

- Loss of support from key stakeholders

- Unpleasant physical workplace environments

- Procedures and processes that create hoops to jump through and delay progress

Personal and Interpersonal Leadership Gauntlets

- People not working well together; difficult interpersonal relationships

- Receiving unexpected, negative feedback

- Being unprepared for a meeting, conversation, or presentation

- Learning that you acted on incorrect or incomplete information

- Showing poor judgment or making decisions that had unintended and negative impacts

- Being dressed down publicly

- Collegial isolation

- Being the target of a bully, backstabber, liar, gossiper, or someone who takes credit for your work

The Daily Churn of Leadership Work

- Overload of tasks

- Lacking skill with a new piece of technology or new approach

- Technology and equipment failures

- Unexpected interruptions and urgent requests

- Persistent interruptions

- Miscommunications and misunderstandings

- Lack of clarity in directions and expectations

- Timeline breeches

- Breeches of protocol and norms

- Unproductive meetings

- Not knowing how to manage requests

- Feeling overwhelmed, overloaded, and unproductively busy

- Lacking a skill or a key piece of information

- Misreading a situation and needing to backpedal

Shattering Personal/Professional Gauntlets

- Being fired for cause

- Having your contract non-renewed

- Facing lawsuits

- Alcohol or other addictions that come to light on the job or in the community

- Being arrested or receiving a DUI

- Being in an abusive relationship

- Being accused or found guilty of a crime

- Being accused or found guilty of violating harassment laws

- Feeling and believing that you lack moral strength as a person or as a leader

- Personal indiscretions that come to light

Clearly, not all of the challenges that hit educational leaders need to have a seismic emotional impact. Many would still agree that a leader's perception and response to stress, loss, crisis, and challenge is personal and highly subjective. What counts as a devastating blow to one school leader may be perceived by another as an expected or even interesting development. For example, in a study of the effects of stress on principals and superintendents who had to make decisions about where to cut budgets—and be the bearers of the bad news to the faculty and school community—researchers Ginsberg and Multon (2011) report that these individuals not only got less sleep and exercise, but they felt less joy for their work and felt like they were living in survival mode. On the other hand, and we may eventually see this in the subjects of Ginsberg and Multon's study, resilient leaders often eventually credit the most difficult circumstances and phases in their lives with giving them the skills and experience they need to handle the demands of the future.

MOVING ON TO CHAPTER 2:
A MODEL OF LEADERSHIP RESILIENCE

What we've established in this first chapter is that when it comes to leadership during times of adversity and unexpected change, bouncing back is not an option. Leaders must bounce forward. They must regain their footing quickly and simultaneously inspire action within new realities. Moreover, leaders must transform the hardships they face as leaders into growth and change for themselves and for the organization. Drawing on ideas from leadership, resilience, and posttraumatic growth, in the next chapter I present a model that describes a way to do this.