



# How to Be Resilient in a Culture of Constant Change

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## Introduction

Volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous (VUCA) and constant change is the new reality for all organizations across all industries.

Increasing competition, increasing customer and consumer demands, globalization, and the increasing intensity of digital disruption means that organizations have to change at a pace never experienced before.

Organizations, and the people within them, have to sense and respond, adapt and flex, diverge and converge, and be truly agile.

In this culture of constant and rapid change, we need people at every level of the organization who can deal with the difficulties, demands, uncertainties, pressures and strains on a daily basis.

Organizations need people who can bounce back from setbacks and make good out of the situation. We need individuals who embrace change and are ready to continually adapt and reposition with confidence and self-reliance.

The world of DevOps is all about continual improvement and there is no end state. Change is perpetual and everyone needs to be resilient.

This eBook describes what resilience is, the benefits and provides five tactics for you to build your own resilience capability.

# Resilience

## ***What is resilience?***

The Collins English dictionary defines resilience as:

**“The ability to recover strength, good humour, etc. quickly; buoyancy”**

Today, resilience is more than just bouncing back.

Resilience is being able to recognize your own emotions and behaviours when under stress and be able to manage them accordingly. It means embracing the fact that constant change is the norm and accepting the reality it brings.

It includes the ability to analyse situations and look at possible ways of responding; applying problem-solving strategies; anticipating disruption and being able to sense and respond; be flexible and take pre-emptive steps in the face of change.

In a nutshell, resilience means changing before you have to and being ahead of the game.

## Benefits

As individuals, there are numerous benefits in building our resilient capabilities.

These include:

- Better physical and mental health**
- Improved cognitive functioning**
- Maintained inner calm in stressful situations**
- Life perceived as a series of challenges not problems**
- Stability in the face of a crisis**
- Capacity to thrive in situations of high demand and ongoing pressure**
- Ability to bounce back and recover quickly from setbacks**
- Failures and setbacks seen as learning opportunities**
- Reduced burn-out**
- Increased sense of community**

# Resilient Tactics

Resilience can be learnt.

There are tangible steps everyone can take to increase their resilience and to support others in doing the same.

Here are five key tactics you can utilize as needed. There are many other tactics but key ones include emotional regulation, collaboration, self-belief, realistic optimism and authenticity, which are discussed here.

You won't need all of them all of the time.

But each time you use one you will become better at it. Some tactics will need practice so the more you use them, the better you become.

You will choose the tactics you believe will best meet your needs in any given situation. Mix and match.



## Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation is the ability to exercise stress tolerance and impulse control. This avoids turning a drama into a crisis and provides the ability to respond to situations rather than react to them. Emotional regulation means that your thoughts don't cloud your judgment.

We need to pause and reflect to increase our self-awareness. We have to take time and put in the effort to discover who we really are and become kind enough to accept our entire self - warts and all.

Emotional regulation includes emotional intelligence.

Daniel Goleman, an American psychologist, brought emotional intelligence to the forefront in his 1995 book "Emotional Intelligence".

Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize, understand our own emotions and also being able to recognize, understand and influence the emotions of others.

Having emotional intelligence helps to build relationships, reduce stress, defuse conflict and improve job satisfaction.

**The cornerstone of emotional intelligence is self-awareness. You can only change what you know. Self-awareness is about knowing yourself.**

In a world of constant and relentless change, our minds are preoccupied by a stream of thought – planning the next thing, immersed in the present and preoccupied with things not completed.

We need to take a mental pause and be sensitive to the underlying murmur of mood – something we rarely do. Our feelings are always with us but we are not always with them. We typically only become aware of our feelings when they build up and boil over. However, if we pay attention we can recognize them before they become so strong.

## **Actions**

Take time out to do nothing. Meditate. Reserve time every week for solitary reflection. This may take the form of going for a long walk or working on a hobby.

Slow down. When you recognize that you are reacting strongly to a situation, slow down to understand why. Through increased self-awareness you can choose how you respond rather than react.

Self-awareness can lead to increased self-control. When experiencing emotions such as anger or hostility, keep a journal for five days. Spend twenty minutes each day writing out your deepest feelings and reflections on what you are experiencing. Monitoring emotions in this way speeds up the recovery from the distress.



## Stay calm and carry on!

Develop hardiness. This is the ability to stay committed, feel in control and be challenged rather than threatened by stress. Practice seeing work as strenuous but also exciting, and change as a chance to develop, rather than an enemy.

# Collaboration

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A DevOps value and also a resilience tactic is collaboration.

Collaboration takes place when two individuals or a group of people work together towards achieving a common goal by sharing their ideas and skills.

It can happen in teams co-located or in teams geographically dispersed through the use of collaboration tools and platforms.

Collaboration means shared learning, breaking down of silos, better problem solving and being able to see the bigger picture.

When responding to constant change 'nobody's as smart as everybody' because the organization must consistently identify the best way to respond to change, innovate, experiment and create.

Collaboration is the epitome of the idiom "a problem shared is a problem halved". Collaboration reduces stress and increases resilience in yourself and those with whom you collaborate. It pulls on diverse and different thinking.

Reaching out to others allows you to collaborate on the achievement of a common goal by thinking, brainstorming, and pulling on differing perspectives.

Working towards a common goal can provide inspiration and a sense of purpose. Collaboration gives you and the others involved an equal opportunity to participate and share ideas.

An important element of building resilience is being prepared to ask for help. It is not a sign of weakness; it is a sign of strength.

What do you need to do, to effectively collaborate in the workplace?

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## Actions

Firstly, reach out to others. Don't wait for others to come to you. Lead by example. Reach out to others who you know will have different views to you so that you get a diversity of perspectives. This often goes against the grain, as we generally like to associate with people who are like ourselves. But diversity is critical to effective collaboration.

Have a clear purpose. Collaborators located together, or geographically dispersed, need a common and shared goal. Get everyone on the same page. Discuss and agree the short and long-term goals and how you intend to collaborate to achieve them.

Your team structure and composition will vary depending on what you are trying to achieve. If you have a specific problem you are trying to resolve, you will most likely used 'closed collaboration' where you select subject matter experts to form the collaborative team. Closed collaboration may consist of a small number of collaborators - two or more people.



If you want to generate ideas and tackle big issues, you may use 'open collaboration' where you invite collaborators from inside and outside the organization to get involved.

Determine which team structure will work best.

Ensure you achieve a diversity of membership, Find people with differing perspectives and opinions. Select people with the skills and expertise necessary to address the problem to be solved or opportunity to be exploited. Include people who are prepared to challenge assumptions and the status quo.

Have clear roles and responsibilities across the group and agree to them. You may want to consider the appointment of a facilitator for the collaboration and keep things focused on the task at hand. However, note that this person is not necessarily the "lead". Everyone should be given a chance to lead.

It is imperative that the right behaviours are encouraged in order to have effective collaboration.

**Collaboration excels when everyone is humble enough to accept the value that others bring. Everyone has their own strengths that they bring.**

Allow others to challenge ideas and have the humility to accept the feedback. Also be humble when providing others with feedback. Do it calmly and as a considered response not a reaction.

Everyone needs to be flexible and adaptable and be prepared to have his or her mindset changed over the course of the collaboration.

When collaborating everyone should "de-label". There is no seniority or hierarchy when people truly collaborate. Everyone is equal. Everyone can contribute. Everyone has something to offer. Everyone can be heard. There is no pulling of rank over another.

Make sure everyone understands the behaviours needed to effectively collaborate.

Agree on the behaviours and give everyone permission to call others on their behaviour if it is not positively contributing to the collaboration.

***Don't forget to celebrate!***

Recognize efforts and celebrate successes. Do this publicly. Also celebrate failures as a learning experience.



## Self-belief

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Believers are confident in their own abilities, and resilient as a result.

Believing in yourself is at the heart of resilience. Self-efficacy is about having the strong, positive belief that you have the capacity and the skills to achieve your goals.

Psychologist Albert Bandura defined self-efficacy as one's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task.

According to Bandura's social cognitive theory, people with high self-efficacy - that is, those who believe they can perform well - are more likely to view difficult tasks as something to be mastered rather than something to be avoided.

Self-efficacy is the optimistic self-belief in our ability to successfully accomplish a task and produce a favourable outcome. It is a belief that through hard work or learning or practice, we can succeed.

Individuals with self-efficacy are more likely to trust their own abilities when faced with constant change. They don't view problems as threats but see them as opportunities for growth and development.



## Actions

Start small. Don't set yourself up for failure by setting such a stretch target that it is going to take what seems like forever to achieve it. If you want to run a marathon, you don't start out on your first outing to run for 42 kilometers. You set goals and build up the distance overtime and award yourself each time you achieve the next goal. By setting interim goals, you increase self-efficacy and your resilience.

Observe. Observe others, similar to yourself, perform a task, and through sustained effort, succeed. Observe your role models succeeding. You can perform the same task by imitation and sustained effort. This observation can result in mastery.

Get support. When other people encourage and convince you to perform a task, you tend to believe that you are more capable of performing the task. So spend time with people who will support and encourage you.

Manage emotions. Your emotional reactions to situations play an important role in self-efficacy. Moods, emotional states, physical reactions and stress levels can all impact on how you feel about your capability in a particular situation. Therefore, if you can find strategies to minimize stress when you are in challenging situations you can improve your self-efficacy.

## Realistic Optimism

When you have realistic optimism, you believe that things can change for the better.

Optimism helps increase resilience by reducing stress.

But optimism is not about having your head in the clouds and hoping things will turn out ok. This is the idealistic optimist. The idealistic optimist believes that success will come to them if they just visualize it hard enough.

On the other hand, the realistic optimist believes that they will succeed, but only with hard work, planning, and persistence. They don't visualize an easy path to success, they think seriously about probable obstacles, and how to overcome them.

The realistic optimist is positive and pragmatic. Whilst they believe that things can change for the better, they recognize that effort is involved. They know that they can shoot for the stars, but they must not lose sight of the ground.

Being a realistic optimist can make a real difference. When pessimists face challenges or obstacles, they give up. When the realistic optimist faces challenges or obstacles, they try harder. They propel themselves towards it and find ways to overcome it and achieve their goals.

**When you are an optimist you think, feel and behave in a way that creates conditions for success.**



Psychologist Gabriele Oettingen performed research on positive thinking and realistic optimism in 1991. She asked 25 over-weight women who had enrolled in a weight loss program how likely they felt they were to reach their goal. She found that those women who were confident that they would succeed lost 26 pounds more than the self-doubters. What was interesting was that the women who believed they would succeed easily lost 24 pounds less

than those who recognized that the weight loss journey was going to take considerable effort.

What this tells us is that those of us that realize that the road to success is a hard one are more likely to succeed. This is because it forces you to take action and plan how to navigate the obstacles you find on that road.

Realistic optimism can be nurtured. You can do this by having a positive attitude and combining that with a candid assessment of the problems and challenges that might await you. It is about not only visualizing the success but also visualizing the steps you will take to achieve that success.

Realistic optimism protects you from giving up when the going gets tough. If something gets in your way, you have the confidence to knuckle down and look for a solution.

There are other benefits. Research has shown that feeling positive can increase productivity and enhance cognitive skills. This is because your disposition affects how the brain operates. When you are down, the brain closes down whilst it focuses on what is wrong and how to get rid of it. When you are up, the brain opens up and you can enter a creative and innovative state.

The good news is that optimism, like all of the resilience tactics, can be learnt.



## Actions

Here is how you can become a realistic optimist.

Rather than focusing on things that are not working, focus on the things that are working.

Surround yourself with more realistic optimists. Pessimism is contagious.

Look at things through a positive lens rather than a negative one.

Identify the goal that you want to achieve. It should be an attainable goal even if it is a stretch one. For example, if you are colour-blind the chances are that you are not going to become a doctor or a pilot. So, don't make that a goal!

***Visualize achievement of the goal, what success looks like, and how that will make you feel.***

Think about the challenges and obstacles you may face along the way.

Think about the steps you can take to overcome the challenges and obstacles. Make a plan.

On the journey, don't get depressed about bad situations. Find a pleasant distraction to take your mind off the situation. Then come back the situation with a problem-solving attitude and refer back to your plan.

Maintain a sense of humour. Humour can give you a new perspective about the problems and challenges you face. You can't be a victim if you are laughing!

Look after yourself. Eat well and sleep well. Exercise and mediate.

Celebrate successes along the way.

Celebrate the achievement of your goal.

Identify the next goal that you want to achieve. Rinse and repeat!

## Authenticity

Being resilient means turning up as your authentic self.

We often try to be someone other than our real self. We have a skewed view that we need to adopt a persona so that others will like us or respect us.

We engage in self-presentation and modify our behaviours, emotions and the way we are seen by others. We can do it for many reasons. We may not feel we can express ourselves freely. We may feel that we have to have all the answers, or we will lose credibility.

However, the energy you put into pretending to be someone else is exhausting. It diminishes both your energy and your resilience. Trying to be someone you are not is not sustainable.

**Being your authentic self is when everything you do is aligned with your goals, your values, your beliefs and your moral compass.**

Being authentic means revealing your true self. This may make you feel vulnerable and you may feel that it will be seen as a weakness. However, vulnerability looks like courage to everyone else.

Being your authentic self at work doesn't mean that you go to work in gym gear or ripped jeans. Authenticity isn't about what you wear; it is about who you are at the core.

When you were afraid to speak up in a meeting or pretended to understand something that you really didn't understand, you are not being true to yourself. You are not being authentic.

We have to be prepared to bring our authentic self to the workplace – we have to be our whole self at work.



This means we are humble, vulnerable and recognize that we, just as everyone else, are not perfect.

When we are authentic, we have the courage to ask questions, say that we don't understand and need help, and make genuine connections with others. This most likely will not come easy. It can be scary.

The voices in your head will tell you that you will get shot down, no-one will listen, "What if they don't like what I say?" "What if it diminishes my career progression?"

We have to stop listening to those voices and be true to ourselves. We have to take the risk and believe that we are better than those voices.

We have to stop avoiding situations because we fear we will make mistakes or fail. To be authentic we must face those fears and feelings and deliberately step out of our comfort zone. We must accept that we will experience fear but observe it as a natural response and not as a reflection on our lack of ability. When we do this, we can radically reduce the negative impact.

Studies have shown that being authentic reduces stress and increases resilience. Being authentic can improve job satisfaction, engagement, and performance.

## Actions

Keep a journal about each time that you are not being your authentic self.

Look for trends and triggers when you are not your whole self.

Admit when you don't know something.

Acknowledge when you have made a mistake.

Ask for help.

## Conclusion

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When you build your resilience capability you can accept ambiguity and embrace uncertainty; you act thoughtfully and manage your emotions; you are self-aware and maintain a positive outlook.

Resilience will increase connections, collaboration and cohesion.

You owe it to yourself to be resilient in the face of constant change.

***Change is not going away – it is just going to keep accelerating. Constant change is the norm.***

AUTHOR BIO

## Karen Ferris

Karen is a self-professed service management and organisational change management rebel with a cause. Her passion to bring about widespread realization that new ways of working require new ways of thinking which in turn mean cultural transformation, has led her to be referred to as the DevOps Culturist.

Acclaimed internationally as an author and speaker, with industry acknowledgement of her reputation as a Thought Leader, she provides both strategic and practical advice and insights to her audiences.

This year saw the publication of Karen's second book "Game On! Change is Constant. Tactics to Win When Leading Change is Everyone's Business".

Her third book, "Unleash the Resiliator Within" is scheduled for publication in early 2020.

An interactive "Resiliator" platform, with twenty resilient tactics, is currently available to organizations that wish to equip and support their people to be resilient in the face of constant change. For more information contact Karen at [Karen@karenferris.com](mailto:Karen@karenferris.com).

