



Live stream workshops – a brand new way to learn

Resilience not Endurance



You don't have to spend long in the Challenger space to realise that what is really being asked of an individual is something that requires you to be willing to dig very deep within yourself again and again. A sort of perpetual alertness to keep pushing the boundaries of your own comfort zone and that of others to deliver the big result, shake up the market or to change the playing field on which your competitors participate.

In some cases the most challenging work for leaders in this space is to slow things down, remain in the ambiguity, deliberately disrupt and disturb habitual patterns of business behaviour to create the conditions for something new to emerge. This kind of action takes courage and self-efficacy.

You are bound to draw criticism towards you. When you step out you also invoke the opinions of others. If it takes longer than others are comfortable with, you can find yourself in the heat of people's fears and anxieties and for most of us that is a very tough place to stand. It is then that you need what Peter Kramer describes as "**Bouncebackability**"!!

I love that word for the audacity it shows with the English language, but most because it seems to capture that special quality about resilience that speaks of elasticity, leaping back into life after a period of compression, the ability to recover readily and begin again.

In Buddhism there is a very helpful idea that is referred to as the 'near enemy'. In it we are able to see that even admirable qualities like resilience can be easily confused with something else. It looks roughly the same, we can use similar words to describe it and yet it has a profoundly different effect on others and ourselves. I think that the near enemy of resilience is endurance.



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I should begin by saying there is nothing, absolutely nothing wrong with endurance. Our history is littered with inspiring examples of people who have endured extraordinary hardship and survived. We can often endure much more than we think we can.

However in the more common context of organisations, those leaders we coach who sometimes think they are resilient have actually fallen into the trap of enduring situations, cultures and practices which are frankly deadening to the spirit of energy and accomplishment. We actually learn to endure all sorts of subtle things in organisations; small things, which over time build up to a wall that desensitises us to what a lively, creative, passionate and potent organisation could really be like. And we go on to tell ourselves that our survival in such an organisation in a leadership position is actually an example of how resilient we are, without realising that as the years roll by bits of our original enthusiasm, our driving energy, our deep desire to do the right thing has been eroded by the fact that we have survived so many changes.

That is why it is the near enemy of resilience. It feels good to have endurance, but it can become the goal in itself. If resilience is lively, challenging, bouncy and full of flexibility; endurance is characterised by stiffness, survival, cutting off from oneself to get through it. That is not the act of a Challenger Leader; it is the act of someone dominated by the need to survive and to cling on.

Several years ago I sat in front of a very talented man who was a senior leader. It was late on a Friday night in his office with a panoramic view over London. He was wealthy and he had definitely “made it”. He was an image of serenity; despite the intense pressures nothing ever seemed to phase him. He went from bigger job to bigger job. He was dissatisfied with the culture he worked in, but he prided himself on being able to not let it affect him. On that evening he finally reached his limit. He sat with his head in his hands and shook. The price he had had to pay was just too much and all his well-practiced endurance that was so applauded by the organisation, and had won him so many appreciative bonuses, finally broke down.

He had endured yes, but he was not resilient. His own story to recovery was long and painful and illustrated to me how confusing endurance for resilience can be a very costly mistake. He had become a fortress; if you are going to be a successful challenger leader you need to become a river. You need to be able to flow with the currents and not cling to the sides.

Written by Claire Breeze