How to Be a Role Model of Resilience

May 5, 2021 7 min read

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When reflecting on the past year, the notion that change is the only constant takes on new meaning. Organizations across sectors were navigating important changes prior to 2020—from heightened customer expectations to digital transformation—but Covid-19 exponentially accelerated those forces while introducing new ones of significance. And let's not forget how abruptly.

In reinforcing the ever-present potential of change to powerfully and pervasively disrupt the status quo, the pandemic has made much of what guided brands toward success up until the recent past null and void. For business leaders, this makes honing organizational agility more of an imperative than ever.

As we continue to navigate an environment typified by VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity), some say the pandemic is just a dress rehearsal for what is to come. If that prediction is true, and this is just the beginning of extraordinary workplace disruption, leaders must give resilience the prominence it deserves by embedding it across the organization. But how?

A two-pronged approach

In practice, driving workforce resilience is two-pronged.

Start with a purposeful and disciplined approach to developing your corporate culture. This will ensure a strong foundation. Then enlist stakeholders in bringing these enduring aspects to life in ways that flex to meet constantly changing marketplace dynamics. This will ensure your organization can withstand adversity. A useful analogy to latch onto is a tree that boasts a deep and strong root system, as well as a trunk and branches that not only grow and change over time but bend without breaking when inclement weather hits.

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Establish strong roots

A firm foundation begins with defining your company's culture. And while shared goals, principles, and practices are important elements, the steadfast pillars of culture, as described by Jim Collins and Jerry Porras in their book *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, are a central purpose and an underlying set of core values.

Your company's purpose should serve as the starting point, compass, and rallying call. Most organizations with a strong culture have a purpose that is customer-committed, deeply embedded and comes to life because leadership helps employees understand the important role they play in it. A core purpose describes your "why," not your "what," and provides deeper reason for an organization's existence beyond profit.

Shared values can be defined as the behavioral expectations that knit your organization together—they describe, at a high level, *how* you achieve your "why." They play a key role in how you interact with the market, and in guiding important coaching and hiring decisions, so they should be more palpable than aspirational.

It is essential for employees to have a clear picture of the practices leaders will engage in to create an environment

where the organization’s purpose and values ring true. Your company’s foundation should blend why your people come to work every day with expectations for how they achieve that central objective, along with meaningful appreciation for their successful execution.

Throughout my entrepreneurial journey, my company’s purpose and values have manifested in several go-to leadership principles that have proven themselves remarkably effective in building and sustaining a strong organizational foundation:

Trust and transparency

Engage all leaders in the ongoing practice of openness and honesty to create an environment of mutual trust between themselves and employees. If you don’t have trust, you don’t have much to build from.

Accountability

Hold employees responsible for creating experiences that enable customers, and colleagues, to find value and positive energy in outcomes.

Collaboration

Foster a “one-team, one-dream” mentality wherein employees seek help from colleagues and customers in their day-to-day work with the ultimate goal of fulfilling on your purpose.

Pilot, pivot, learn

Encourage teams to be strategic-minded yet action-oriented, clear on when and how to pivot to achieve the best outcomes. Especially in an ever-changing environment, the value of progress is often more important than perfection.

Work hard, play hard

Empower employees to get the job done well and have fun along

the way through meaningful investment in relationships and human connection.

Identifying natural, go-to principles can help leaders steer their organizations from a place of confidence rather than fear in uncertain, and normal, times. They provide all employees with a solid footing to rely on as change takes place around them.

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Flex the foundation

Even strong foundations can be prone to crack if flexibility isn't purposefully architected in. And, since people are generally the most valuable and prevalent asset of an organization, leaning on the people dimension to facilitate flexibility is key. Several years ago, Harvard Business Review published an article by Claudio Fernández-Aráoz centered around talent spotting in the 21st century. The premise of the piece is that given change is inevitable, it is important to focus talent efforts on hiring and developing individuals who can adapt and grow in increasingly complex environments.

In an especially VUCA world, it's less about hiring for "what got you here" and more about building a team that "will get you there."

Here are a few ways in which this can manifest:

Talent spot with potential in mind

Aim to fill your organization with the hallmarks of a growth mindset, recruiting talent not only on the skills they possess today or successes of their past, but on their long-term potential. This can be accomplished by seeking out traits like curiosity, engagement, determination, and insightfulness, as

Fernández-Aráoz highlights in *21st-Century Talent Spotting*.

Cultivate strong, strategic partnerships

Workforce resilience requires realization that no organization can be the best at everything. Teamwork can transcend your own four walls. So, embrace external collaboration with individual contractors and complementary companies as needed. Seek out like-minded specialists who can help you fulfill on your brand promise by accounting for inevitable gaps in skillset and bandwidth.

Enlist your customers to co-create the future together

No business exists without customers. To continue delivering value to them in an everchanging climate, it is essential that you treat them as the stakeholders they are in the success of your brand and invest in deeply understanding their needs and aspirations. Ask them questions and observe their behaviors to build empathy. This will enable employees, thus your company overall, to continuously evolve capabilities in lockstep with the market versus playing catch-up down the road.

Start with self

This article began with change and, while it's fairly easy to assess what those around us can do, a true leader follows the principle of being the change they wish to see. Embedding resilience in employees' everyday actions may start with reinventing yourself and requires an ongoing commitment to self-evolution. After all, change often calls for sacrifice and you can't expect your people to adapt to change if you aren't willing to.

I'll leave you with this: Years ago, I heard the quote, "If you don't like change, you'll like irrelevance a whole lot less." Those words truly exemplify the mindset we must have about workforce resilience, not just in the face of this

pandemic, but in the face of the countless changes sure to come our way.

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