

**white
paper**

resilience

Resilience – because life is imperfect

We live in an **age of disruption**. Any review of current underlying forces will tell you that the rate of disruption is increasing. So if we cannot control the rate of change what can we control? The only thing is our internal response to change and adversity, and what we do. The future of our social systems, societies and the planet as a whole depends upon the choices we make in those moments.

Moving forward towards what could be, creating space for sensing what is going on, and letting go of the old and co-creating the new delivers opportunity and renewal.

Resilience is a key capability that we need in order to develop our internal response. It is something that we can all nurture and grow.

On September 15th 2008, Lehman Brothers collapsed into bankruptcy; plunging the world into an unprecedented financial crisis that has gripped the globe ever since.

It was not just the major financial institutions that felt the seismic shifts in power but the shockwaves impacted every institution – small business to global multi-nationals and governments all around the world – in ways that at the time we could not possibly imagine or quantify.

And it changed us all, even just a little bit, forever.

For in every crisis there is opportunity, and there is challenge; and for many,

Resilience; noun

- ◎ **The ability to recover from shock or difficulties.**
- ◎ **To bounce back and adapt when things don't go as planned.**

the events of September 2008 have delivered blow after knockout blow. An example - real wages in western democracies are in 2019 still 7% below where they were in 2008.

But this isn't a story about empires, but about people – you and me.

In 1981 San Francisco, **Chris Gardner** had invested all of his money into a portable product that he personally sold door-to-door to physicians. However, his product is not selling, and his problems mount. His wife leaves him with custody of their son and he can no longer make the payments on their house, resorting to him and his son living in homeless shelters.

Through all of this he is determined to make the best of who he is. He enrolls in an unpaid internship programme for a brokerage firm knowing that only one graduate will be employed, and that the only way he will have money in his pocket to survive is to sell the remaining product units he has.

He not only makes it through but becomes the intern chosen, and moves on to found his own successful brokerage company.

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When **faced with adversity** what makes some people embrace the challenge and move towards what could be; and others recoil from the shock and move away from what might be?

At **just add water** we have worked with a large number of organisations across all sectors. We have noticed that **fundamental to wellness** is the **capacity for resilience**. Resilience is a bedrock of wellness – whilst other aspects of wellness inform and contribute to building resilience, the ability to be resilient and bounce back is core to the very essence of our well being. We know that successful people in society and business have this capacity - they hold a resilient attitude and mindset.

At the heart of resilience is a paradox. Resilience requires us to be **both vulnerable and strong**.

Our world is full of paradoxes, many that we do not face into, or embrace.

Some paradoxes that are very real and we are familiar with are: David Cameron on the morning after a referendum vote that undermined his leadership; Hilary Clinton watching a promised land slip away in a sea of angry voters set on reshaping the nation's institutions; or Jose Mourinho not understanding the world of football has moved on and that there are new ways of building winning teams.

Thinking in paradoxes means exploring contradictory concepts and being



capable of holding complex thoughts as we evaluate ideas and circumstances so that we can make good decisions.

This volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world means that living in the paradox requires us to hold greater levels of personal resilience and to hold a deeply curious and adaptive mindset.

- ◎ **52% of people believe that the world is changing faster than their ability to adapt**
- ◎ **Over 55% of people feel their leaders are not adapting well to the changing environment**
- ◎ **Only 13% think leaders are doing an excellent / very good job.**

Source: Conscious Index conducted by The Harris Poll and Healthy Companies Intl 2018.

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Challenging circumstances require us to find **deep reserves of resilience and creativity**. They require us to be curious, ask questions and hold transformative conversations. Resilience requires courage – the foundation of which is vulnerability – that is the ability to navigate uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure.

Above all, resilient people understand that life is imperfect - as the philosophy of wabi-sabi teaches us, the passage of time shows us everything is fleeting. Life is messy, full of adventures, uncertainty, trauma and randomness.

In 2006, Chris Gardner sold his brokerage firm, he anticipated the impending financial crisis. Just before his wife's death, she challenged him to find true happiness and fulfilment in the remainder of his life.

Today, Chris travels the world 200 days a year as a motivational speaker, encouraging others to face into their challenges and move forward with optimism and spirit. He credits his

resilience and success to his mother, and the high expectations placed on him by his children.

Chris Gardner's story was turned into a successful film starring Will Smith; *The Pursuit of Happyness*. We enjoy watching movies to see a central character that we can relate to, struggle to overcome adversity. It is the core to our enjoyment of narratives and stories. If there is no conflict, there is no narrative, there is no movie. We revel in resilience in our filmic heroes; can we do the same in our own journeys?

As **Joseph Campbell** wrote over a hundred years ago:

'If you see your path laid out in front of you step by step you know it's not your path. Your own path you make with every step you take. That's why it's your own path'.



Characteristics of Resilient people

Whilst resilience is developed in people in part through experience – experiencing set backs and knowing that you can bounce back instils resilience - it can also be developed in individuals and teams to build organisational strength.

Calm Resilient people are calm, energised, engaged, focused and creative. These characteristics create organisation agility.

Positive Positive / optimistic view of the future. They don't let setbacks affect them – they have developed recovery skills. They live in a world of possibility.

Empathetic They care about people. Community and Connection are really important to them.

Self Aware They recognise that their view of the world and events will be limited by their own sense of reality. They hold their assumptions lightly and engage in conversations with people to gain alternative perspectives and point of view.

Curious They ask questions, they love to learn and hold a growth mindset.

Thrive on challenge They see difficulties as a challenge, not as something that paralyses you. They learn from failures and mistakes and as opportunities for growth.

Adaptive They recognise when they need to adapt and change in terms of what they are delivering but also hold a flexible mindset.

Presence and Flow They are immersed in what they are doing and find enjoyment in achieving their goals. can generate dynamic, innovative ideas.

Humility 'Humility isn't thinking less of yourself; it's thinking of yourself less'

Commitment They are committed to goals and achievements – they are clear on what they want to accomplish in life as well as work – their relationships, friendships, causes as well as work.

Purpose Resilient people have a real purpose inside that gives meaning to your days and drives you to share the best of yourself. If you don't know what it is yet, as Victor Frankl says, your mission is to discover it.

Navigate complexity They live in the paradox – they can hold conflicting truths and find their way through them.

Are 'on-line' They connect with their deep inner wisdom and well-being. On line is quiet, its clarity, contentment, happiness and well being.

'He who has a why to live for, can bear almost any how' Nietzsche.

How many of these characteristics do you recognise in yourself?

Which ones might you need to develop further to deepen your personal resilience in order to navigate the complex world we find ourselves in?