



Building your resilience backbone

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In the demanding world of work, resilience isn't a soft skill or some mystical quality you're either born with or without. It's a practical, evidence-based set of capabilities that can be developed, measured, and strengthened - much like building physical fitness.

The Resilience Institute defines resilience as "a set of capabilities that enable you to bounce back from adversity, secure sustainable well-being, and perform with care - care for yourself, for others, and for the planet." After 22 years of research impacting over 100,000 lives globally, they've proven what many suspected: resilience is learnable.

Why "Backbone"?

Your backbone provides both structure and flexibility. It holds you upright under pressure while allowing you to bend, twist, and adapt. Mental resilience works the same way - it's not about being rigid or unbreakable, but about

having a strong foundation that allows you to flex without breaking when challenges arise.

Understanding the Resilience Spiral

Think of resilience as a spiral rather than a fixed state. We're constantly moving either upward or downward depending on how we respond to pressure.

The **upward spiral** looks like: calm presence, psychological safety, effective decisions, optimism, focus, flexibility, meaning, flow, and joy. This is where you perform with care and sustain your wellbeing.

The **downward spiral** manifests in recognisable stages: intensity and confusion, loss of attention and distraction, doubt and anxiety, frustration and anger, and finally submission and fatigue.

Research from the University of California found that after an interruption, it takes 23 minutes to return to a task with the same level of concentration - illustrating how easily we can slip downward when our boundaries are compromised.

Recognising your warning signals

The key to building resilience is recognising where you are on the spiral.

What are your personal warning signals? For some, it's checking emails constantly or feeling unable to focus.

For others, it's irritability with colleagues or that Sunday evening dread. These signals aren't weaknesses - they're data points telling you it's time to intervene.

Bouncing back: practical actions

Research by Di Stefano and colleagues found that leaders who take just 15 minutes of reflection time at the end of each day are 23% more productive and make decisions 20% more aligned with their organisation's long-term objectives. This isn't about adding more to your plate - it's about working smarter.

When you recognise downward spiral signals, the fastest way to bounce back is to **simplify**.

Clarify **the one key task that matters most right now**.

Studies on **multitasking** show that juggling five projects simultaneously can cost you up to 80% of your working time to context switching. Mono-tasking isn't just more effective - it protects your brain's emotional control centres.

Other upward momentum builders include: setting specific times for email rather than constant checking, protecting blocks of uninterrupted work time, and building recovery rhythms into your day (not just your annual leave).

Your resilience action plan

Resilience, like physical fitness, is built through consistent practice, not one-off interventions.

What are three actions you can take today, this week, and this month to enhance your resilience strengths and mitigate your resilience risks?

Perhaps today you'll notice your warning signals without judgement. This week you might experiment with email boundaries. This month you could establish a 15-minute daily reflection practice.

Your resilience backbone is already there - now it's time to strengthen it deliberately, practically, and with care.

Mono-tasking is more effective & protects your brain's emotional control centres.