



Management Assistance Program

PROMOTING A RESILIENT WORKFORCE IN A FAST-PACED ENVIRONMENT

Overcoming Workplace Adversity through Techniques of Revitalization

GOALS:

To help organizations, managers and employees:

- Develop resiliency skills to cope with the workplace challenges and changes which are inherent in many organizations.
- Practice daily resilience strategies to improve performance and decrease workplace burnout, conflict, and disability.
- Create opportunities and activities in the workplace that promote resilience skills.
- Reduce workplace situations and dynamics that contribute to employee and management adversity and powerlessness.

OVERVIEW:

The human resource manager at a large manufacturing plant plastered a huge blueprint of the entire site in the employee break room. The blueprint was covered with color coded dots that represented strategic locations where machinery breakdowns, accidents, safety hazards, near misses and other high risk areas had been identified and documented over the past year. The manager explained to the employees that 90% of the organization's resources and energy would be spent in trying to improve the high risk areas represented on the blueprint because they already knew that these were their most vulnerable spots.

People, like organizations also have vulnerable areas where slight improvements and positive changes can produce significant effects. Organizations that invest energy and resources into practical efforts to address the vulnerabilities of their human architecture understand the power of developing organizational resilience. It is a proactive way of recognizing weaknesses and allotting appropriate resources early before they become major deficits. Think of the site blueprint applied to the human issues of stress, conflict, frustration, low morale or performance problems. Of course

it would not be appropriate to post that kind of information in the break room but this same concept of early identification and direct application of effective resources lies at the heart of resilience training in the workplace.

What is Resilience Training? There is no magic formula that automatically produces resilience in individuals. It is the process of identifying work related challenges, putting boundaries around their impact and developing strategies to resolve or control those problems in the future. It can transform the thinking of both employees and their entire departments. There are employees who will not embrace the concepts of workplace resilience (who consistently think of themselves as victims and will not take responsibility for their role in negative outcomes). For these individuals, resilience training may also represent the development of personal characteristics or traits that will move them to higher levels of functioning by: thinking through, planning for, reacting to, and embracing the aspects of their jobs that they can control. Both parts of this training (transformation of thinking and the development of traits) include the formation of:

- Mind Sets – Thinking situations through clearly and setting specific goals and objectives that are focal points for actions
- Behavioral Patterns – Forcing new habits and behaviors that transform outdated and less effective ones
- Styles - Operating and functioning in ways which are consistent and effective
- Preparations – Setting up the dynamics for optimal interactions or results
- Approaches - Engaging projects or persons in the most advantageous ways
- Processes – Executing specific tasks and procedures to gain specific results
- Commitment – Striving for continual improvements through creative ideas
- Dedication – Sticking to the primary goals to achieve ultimate results
- Maturity – Allowing flexibility and wisdom to prevail when making decisions
- Openness – Soliciting the opinions and views of others

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- Assertive Dialogue – Expressing their opinions and views in a positive context
- Initiation - Knowing when to act based on the information gathered
- Personal Responsibility – Taking complete ownership of actions based on thoughtful consideration of the consequences.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Identify the workplace factors that contribute to employee adversity and powerlessness.

The first step in creating workplace resilience is to gain an understanding of the specific challenges that the employees perceive they are facing on a regular basis at work. These may include:

- Conflict and Uncertainty – never knowing what to expect
- Job Pressure – the quantity of work
- Job Scope- the amount of responsibility associated with the job
- Rapport with Management – unclear vision or direction
- Spillover into Home/Family – loose boundaries between work and home
- Repetitive Tasks – monotony or boredom
- Performance Issues/Quotas – unattainable standards or unrealistic deadlines
- Overdependence on Others – difficulties with team members
- Job Instability and Downsizing – large shifts in the workforce
- Conflict – between co-workers or with management
- Stress Levels – work stress overload, exhaustion, or burnout.

2. Identify the workplace factors that contribute to management adversity and powerlessness.

The second step in creating a resilient workplace is to gain an understanding of the constraints of the department through the eyes of management. Sorting out the difference between challenging events that are created as a result of scheduling, timeframes, workload and production expectations (structural issues) versus those that are caused by conflict, aggressive styles, unreasonable demands, unclear roles and responsibilities and individual problems (relational challenges). These may include:

Organizational Challenges

- Constant organizational changes
- Lack of qualified staff
- Lack of resources and contingency plans
- Unclear policies and procedures
- Financial constraints
- Industry standards and regulations
- Labor or union issues
- Safety sensitive work environment
- Customer/ client requirements
- Quality and safety standards
- Shifting or stagnant workforce
- Market fluctuations
- Leadership decisions and demands

Relational Challenges

- Workplace gender or generation gaps
- Diversity or personality issues
- Unresolved individual or departmental conflicts
- Lack of communication, trust, or sensitivity
- Overlapping or missing job responsibilities
- Inappropriate relationships or disrespectful behaviors

3. Provide staff with tangible incentives to increase their resilience skills

Getting the staff “on board” regarding the development of their resilience skills is critical to the successful implementation of these attributes in the workplace. They must participate in the process if they are to take the next step of shared ownership (otherwise they will not become initially invested or will let the skills atrophy). Below are some benefits of the process of developing resilience:

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- Increased control over work dynamics and the ability to manage work stresses
- Increased relational skills and the ability to deal with difficult people
- Increased communication skills and problem resolution through effective dialogue
- Increased morale and teamwork
- Decreased workplace stress related incidents
- Decreased fears and frustrations related to workplace changes
- Decreased number of inappropriate behaviors
- Decreased problems with work/life balance issues

4. Provide formal or informal resilience training across the organization and encourage staff to practice resilience techniques which include:

- Emotion Regulation
- Impulse Control
- Causal Analysis
- Self-Efficacy
- Realistic Optimism
- Empathy
- Reaching Out

SUMMARY: Tips for Promoting Workplace Resiliency

- Change the way you think about adversity in order to change the way you react to it
- Realize that resilience is a quality that can be developed within most individuals
- Understand that resilience can be learned at any age but begins with a purpose
- Recognize the importance of resiliency in all aspects of life – especially at work
- Develop the resilience skills by practicing resilience techniques and behaviors
- Control thoughts and emotions to diminishing negative habits and symptoms through resilience strategies
- Use resilience techniques at work to increase productivity and decrease work-related stress and anxiety
- Begin the process of increasing resiliency by evaluating the areas of work where it will be most effective or useful
- Commit to changing your reactions to challenges and adversity and begin to take control over the negative elements in your work that most impact you
- Be patient with your resilience development progress and begin again when you have setbacks
- Set realistic expectations of time, energy and resources needed to develop resiliency skills and solicit assistance from others
- Keep a record of your resilience journey and plot your success in mastering this skill by listing the number of times and ways you have exhibited the techniques