



Setting yourself up for wellbeing – **Personal Resilience**

COVID-19 crisis special edition

Personal Toolkit

Introduction

At Robertson Cooper, we have been supporting mental health and wellbeing in the workplace for over 20 years, yet this current situation with Covid-19 has challenged our mental health and wellbeing like never before; everything about our world of work have been turned upside-down. Uncertainty and insecurity about health, finances, our work and our families are challenging each and every one of us, and the emotional impact is becoming very real for many of us.

This free guide shares some of the knowledge and resources we have built up over the years and it has one very specific aim – *to support you and your colleagues in building strength and resilience so you are as ready as you can be for the current and future emotional strain.*

About this toolkit

1. No one can become resilient overnight, but our aim is to set you off knowing what will make a difference in your life; *we can point you in the right direction*
2. Your wellbeing is in your control to a certain extent, even now, Making a conscious commitment to taking some control of how you are reacting to the crisis and not just *let it happen to you*, is how you will make a difference to your overall wellbeing and maintain your resilience.
3. Pick one thing at a time to work on and don't over-commit yourself. If you work hard on one area and make progress you are moving in the right direction.
4. Always remember, there is not one simple fix that will improve your wellbeing over the long-term, it takes a concerted effort across many different areas of your physical, psychological and social life to sustain and maintain good health and wellbeing.

Section 1: What do we mean by mental health and wellbeing?

At Robertson Cooper, we have been working in the science of wellbeing for many years, leading the research to improve the experience of work for people everywhere. We frame mental health and wellbeing in a very simple and accessible way – we want to create more Good Days at Work for everyone, everywhere.

But what is a Good Day at Work?

Our own research based on thousands of pieces of data shows that there are four things that are in place when people experience a Good Day at Work, and when you look carefully at these, you will see that for many of us each of these areas has been impacted by this current crisis – a Good Day at Work has become more difficult right now.



How has your experience of work changed since the crisis across these four areas?

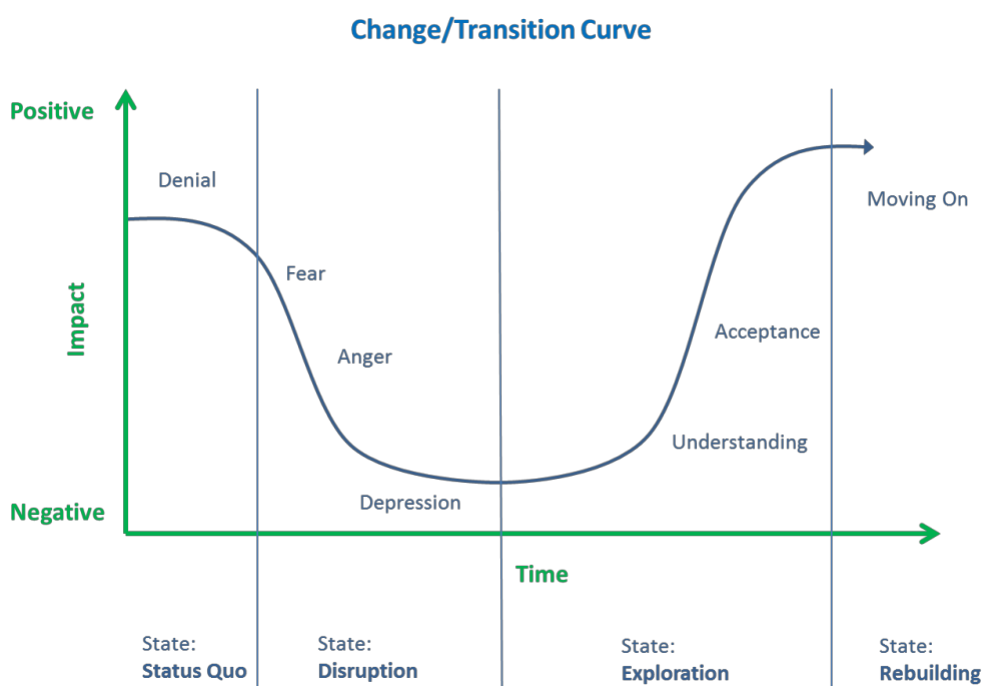
Doing this exercise will help you to process the changes that have occurred for you in your work and life in general. It will enable you to make judgements about why and where you want to prioritise some of the resilience strategies that we will come onto later.

		Your analysis of your current status	Impact/change to work life	Impact/change to home life
Positive Experiences	Are you feeling motivated by your work and life?			
Social Relationships	Has the quality of your relationships changed?			
Meaning	Do you feel like your work and life has purpose and is making an impact?			
Getting things done	Do you feel like you are equipped to get on and do your job/home tasks?			

The Impact of Change on our wellbeing

As implied by the exercise above, it is likely that you have experienced change to your working (and home) life in this crisis, so understanding the impact of change on wellbeing can be very helpful when it comes to processing our emotions and behaviours.

We all process change differently in terms of the speed we transit the change and the impact it has on us. However, there are commonalities, and this is represented by the Change Curve model below. The key thing to notice in this diagram is that the first stages of change are highly disruptive to our emotions, most of us will feel fear about the uncertainty this crisis has presented to us, anger about the injustices of the changes to our lives, and sadness about the things we have lost as a result of the crisis.



Most of us are still firmly in the 'Disruption' area of the change curve and the emotional impact on us is high, so the question is, how do we start to navigate this change in the healthiest way possible?

Building Personal Resilience

Developing resilience has a very simple benefit, it helps us move through change faster and with the least possible emotional impact, thus improving our overall wellbeing.

People who are resilient will still experience the negative emotional responses to change such as fear, anger and sadness, but because they have taken conscious and planned effort to be as resilient as possible they can move through change more quickly and experience better overall wellbeing throughout.

Where to start in navigating the changes?

1. Review and resolve your habits that influence the **available energy** you have every day.

To have a Good Day at Work, we know that you need to have energy available to deal with the demands you will face. Renewing your available energy comes from paying attention to the fundamental pillars of wellbeing – sleep, nutrition, movement & exercise and stress management. Our COVID-19 resources page has some recommendations to assist you in doing this <https://www.robertsoncooper.com/finding-your-way-back-to-good-days-at-work-resources-and-recommendations/>

Once you feel like you have developed good habits around your energy management in light of the changes to your work and home patterns, you can look to take the next step, developing your personal resilience strategies....

2. Develop your personal resilience strategies

Robertson Cooper's validated resilience model came from research from another crisis, the 9/11 disaster. By examining how survivors made their way through the crisis, we were able to identify the factors which support people in healthily navigating change.

There are four resilience strategies identified in the model, and by using a blend of each of these, we can start to come through the highly emotional disruptive stage in a healthier state.



If you have not completed your *i-resilience* report, this is your first step on starting to address your own personalised journey to develop your resilience.

You can complete your report here: <https://www.robertsoncooper.com/iresilience/>

Your Personal Resilience Journey

The *i-resilience* report will show you how you naturally use each of the resilience strategies and this can be considered your natural starting point and demonstrates your preference for using each of the strategies.

With this information, you can start to identify where you may be able to strengthen your resilience; it is possible to build resilience and develop your strength in each of the areas despite your starting point.

In the following pages, we offer you some support in developing your strength across each of the resilience strategies, specifically in response to the current threat to our mental health and wellbeing presented by the Covid-19 crisis.

Confidence

Resilient people are often confident people. They obviously may be more confident in some areas than others but overall, they have a belief in their own capabilities, and they know what they are – good and bad!

Have you forgotten where your strengths lie in the midst of this crisis?

Try this exercise to remind yourself of your strengths:

Exercise: Write down 8 strengths that you have in one minute! If you are struggling with this, ask a colleague, a family member or friend and they will remind you!

1.	5.
2.	6.
3.	7.
4.	8.

Remind yourself of your capabilities:

- If you need assistance on discovering your strengths, go to: <https://www.viacharacter.org/www/>
- Update your CV, this will force you to remind yourself of your strengths
- Make a list of all the things you have achieved so far in your life
- Get to know yourself and how you react to the world by doing a (validated) personality test like our i-resilience questionnaire <https://www.robertsoncooper.com/iresilience/>

Social Health & Social Support

Research suggests that people who have supportive social networks choose more active coping strategies for dealing with stressful situations. An active coping strategy means that individuals manage their appraisal of events rather than avoiding them.

Obviously, the current status with COVID-19 has forced a disruption to our social support networks so it is important that we recalibrate how we use this resilience strategy. A broader view of the importance of this strategy can be found [in this blog](#) from our Managing Director, Ben Moss.

Key Questions for you to assess how effectively you are currently using this strategy:

- Who are you regularly talking to if you are experiencing very high pressure?
- How do you feel about asking for support?
- What other benefits are there from being in your social support network?
- Is virtual meeting technology working for you... or not?

Purposefulness

People with resilience have a strong sense of purpose and this carries them through stressful times; if you know clearly what the goals and objectives are of your job and life, you will be able to endure the hard times better by seeing beyond current challenges to the outcome. When we know why we are doing something, we tend to 'put up with' more.

Clearly, for all of us sense of purpose has been shifted in this crisis, so the following questions may help you start to realign your purpose in the midst of the crisis.

- Have you identified your core values that you live your life by? If so, how are they helping you manage the change and your emotions? If you haven't identified your core values, try here: (n.b. There is no reliable measure of this, so take this with a pinch of salt)
<https://www.mindcoolness.com/blog/find-out-your-core-values/>
- Are you prioritising things and tasks that align with your core values?
- Do you have clarity of purpose from your employer in this crisis and can you re-align to that? If it's not there in the crisis you can, and should, ask the question.

Adaptability

When something bad happens, it is important to examine *why* we think that bad thing happened. If we attribute the reason wrongly there is a very risk of falling into pessimistic thinking. If that happens, we need to dispute the pessimism because it will consistently leave us feeling more helpless and unable to healthily move through change.

The table below outlines the difference between how an optimistic and pessimistic thinker will perceive cause *when it comes to the same event*, in this case the Coronavirus crisis.

Optimistic Thinking	Pessimistic Thinking
<p>Temporary</p> <p>“This will pass, we will get back to normal eventually”</p>	<p>Permanent</p> <p>“We will never get back to normal. It is always going to be like this”</p>
<p>Just this specific thing</p> <p>“There are still some good things in my life despite the drastic changes”</p>	<p>Everything</p> <p>“Because of this crisis there is absolutely no joy. Everything is terrible”</p>
<p>External Causes</p> <p>“The reason this happened is outside my control, and everyone is challenged by this in different ways”</p>	<p>My Fault</p> <p>“Things like this always happen to me and it is much worse for me than other people”</p>



PERSISTENCE



GIVING UP

If you recognise yourself as being stuck in pessimistic thinking, it is important that you tackle it. Pessimism is inevitable in some form at times, but not allowing yourself to get stuck there is very important for your overall wellbeing and transiting the changes.

Top tips for staying optimistic:

- Remind yourself of the Change Curve and the natural process of dealing with change - “This too shall pass” and there will be “light at the end of the tunnel”
- Journal your thoughts in a diary, this helps to process your emotions and recognise any pessimistic thinking
- Practice gratitude to remember there are still good things in life. A great exercise for you and your family to do every day is the ‘3 Good Things’ exercise. See details here: <https://www.actionforhappiness.org/take-action/find-three-good-things-each-day>

Summary

Developing your resilience is a choice you must make; do you want to improve your mental health and wellbeing and have the best days at work that are possible right now? If the answer is yes, then it is time to commit and be proactive:

<p>Resilience strategy you would like to improve. e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating more opportunity for quality social support • Examine my purpose and core values • Find out my strengths in an objective way 	
<p>How do you plan to commit to this action? e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spend an hour a week consciously developing my resilience 	
<p>When will you check back on your progress?</p>	

Deliberately developing your resilience will enable you to come through these changes and bounce back quicker and stronger, you are less likely to experience the symptoms of stress and you can maintain your performance over time.

We hope you have found this guide useful and we wish you all the best in staying well throughout this crisis.

Keep in touch: www.robertsoncooper.com

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